

## NEWS

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### GREENING THE WATER UTILITY OF THE FUTURE

**U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities, Greenville, SC**

For IMMEDIATE RELEASE (February 29, 2016)

The U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities (Endowment) hosted a special session at the 2016 Utility Management Conference to highlight the important role that forests and other types of natural or green infrastructure play in protecting drinking water sources, reducing water treatment costs, and managing stormwater. Four speakers from across the U.S. highlighted case studies and new opportunities to integrate forests and green infrastructure into the “Water Resources Utility of the Future,” the conference theme. The session was held Saturday morning, February 27, 2016, in San Diego.

“The [Water Resources Utility of the Future Blueprint for Action](#) document highlights an important role for green infrastructure, such as well-managed forests,” said Peter Stangel, the Endowment’s Senior Vice President and session organizer. “Our speakers have first-hand experience with both the challenges and benefits of green infrastructure as an important complement to traditional, man-made approaches such as water treatment facilities. They presented a compelling case for the economic and social benefits of green infrastructure.”

Andy Lipkis, President and Founder of TreePeople, highlighted the Greater Los Angeles Water Collaborative, an unprecedented partnership of the LA Department of Water and Power, LA County Flood Control, and LA City Sanitation, organized by TreePeople. The Collaborative is a pathway to quickly and cost-effectively adapt the region to survive and thrive in its new climate norm of long-term water shortages punctuated by periodic, severe flooding.

Kevin Shafer, Executive Director of the Metropolitan Milwaukee Sewerage District, described how a “backbone” of treatment plants, sewers, and storage vessels, is complemented by green approaches that include rain barrels, rain gardens, bioretention, and integrating natural systems with the city’s built environment.

Paul Thomas Hunt, Environmental Services Manager at Portland Water District (Maine) emphasized the critical role that healthy forests play in maintaining exceptional quality in their water supply. This allows their District to operate under an exemption to the filtration requirements of the federal Safe Drinking Water Act, a status that avoids treatment

enhancements that could total \$50 million in capital costs. The District partners with land trusts and others to protect forests through conservation easements and other approaches.

Rowan Schmidt, Project Leader for Earth Economics, of Tacoma, Washington, noted that built capital depreciates, but natural capital appreciates. Including ecosystem services—such as clean water-- provided by green infrastructure to inform cost-benefit analyses can shift the balance of investment toward these more resilient and sustainable approaches.

An estimated two-thirds of the freshwater in the U.S. originates in forests. Forests play an important role purifying water and regulating flow. Urban and wetland forests help control storm water from cities and can moderate floods. Promoting the many benefits of healthy, well-managed forests for water and management is a primary focus for the Endowment. To this end, the Endowment has formed partnerships with the American Water Works Association, the Water Research Foundation, the Water Environment Research Foundation, and others.

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The **U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities** (the Endowment) is a not-for-profit public charity working collaboratively with partners in the public and private sectors to advance systemic, transformative, and sustainable change for the health and vitality of the nation's working forests and forest-reliant communities – [www.usendowment.org](http://www.usendowment.org)