Nature & the NETWORK
Building a new framework for people and nature to work together.

2008 National Conference on Urban Ecosystems
May 28 – 30, 2008 | Caribe Royale Hotel | Orlando, Florida | www.americanforests.org/conference

Conference Narrative

Nature and the Network:
Defining the Problem Correctly
Starting the Solution Process

The environment is a seamless, interactive system that wraps the earth. It is the product of four billion years of evolution. This is Nature. The Human Network are built systems that facilitate communication, trade, transport and other infrastructure that support communities. Both Nature and the Human Network function as systems that depend on one other. The Human Network can not continue to expand without the natural resources and ecosystem services that Nature provides. The natural system can not thrive if the human network disrupts its fundamental ecological processes. The 2008 National Conference on Urban Ecosystems will focus on building a new framework which supports both Nature and the Human Network.

The conference will begin by laying a foundation of Nature and the Human Network—exploring how each system each evolved and how each functions today. The balance of the conference will focus on building a new framework to support the systems of Nature and the Network in the future. The conference will address national, regional and local issues required to build this new framework. Conference sessions will provide forums for developing and articulating federal agency ideas for managing Nature and the Network, like the redesign of the US Forest Service State and Private Forestry. Other agencies such as EPA, Department of Economic Development and Department of Transportation will hold forums to discuss their new ideas and then share these ideas within the conference audience as a whole.

Background

The growth of the Human Network has collided with Nature. This is not just a result of the Network expanding, but because it is inefficient in design and its inability to grow in a way that enhances the essential functions of the natural system.

Amazingly, even though many people intuitively understand that the environment is a system, business, government, and even activist groups view Nature and the Human Network as a particular place and not as a system. Conflicts arise over the fate of a specific wetland or wooded area. Just like a diabetes patient whose ailing foot is treated instead of the whole patient, the Mississippi River is managed like an isolated drainage canal instead of the dynamic and complex environmental system that it is. Neither business nor environmental activists have been able to enlarge their perspective—narrowly arguing about the development of a place instead of working with the natural system and growing the network to be compatible with it. This conference is designed to start rebuilding the framework and the broad-based collaboration required to support both systems.

This conference brings together a diverse audience, with seemingly different viewpoints to inspire a new approach—one that addresses nature and the network as one problem with one common solution—building eco-efficient networks.