

Preface

My purpose in writing this book is to motivate urban foresters and ecologists to break through a barrier created by the hallowed concept of old growth forest as “undisturbed by humans.” Many urban forests are composed of old trees and admired by visitors as being old growth forests. However, the traditional scientific education afforded foresters and ecologists rejects classification of any urban forest as old growth because the forest did not achieve the successional climax state as a result of human disturbances. Research on urban forests is not hindered by an artificial conceptual framework of age in rural forests. Recognizing old growth forests in urban settings expands the spectrum of urban forest research to include a focus on long-term changes in the relationships between human-caused changes and urban forest dynamics. Even foresters and ecologists conducting research in rural old growth forests will reap the benefits of understanding critical issues such as species introductions and climate change that have affected old growth urban forests across our planet for centuries.

Because an unfamiliar genre is best exemplified by specific examples from a real-world context, I provide old growth original research from the forest region and metropolitan areas I have studied for decades. A critical analysis of the research is provided to orient current and future urban foresters and ecologists as well as advocates for the forests to the historical ecology methods employed to conduct research in old growth urban forest dynamics. This research is both theoretical and applied because the forests are typically found on public lands and have already gained public recognition. Consequently, this book also provides a science-based framework for the management and restoration of old growth urban forests through partnerships of foresters, scientists, educators, students, government officials, and community neighbors. In the final view, only joint efforts will move the science forward and permit old growth urban forests to remain a part of human communities for centuries into the future.

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