



THE **SANDBOX** BLOG

Wood at Work 2015

April Greene — November 09, 2015

On October 30, 2015, *Wood at Work* convened over 120 influential architects, foresters, policy makers, ecologists, and urban planners from around the world to address the climate change, economic, human well-being, and biodiversity issues surrounding the materials we use in urban building—and, ultimately, to radically impact the discourse around wood and forest policy in the world's cities.

The conference took place in our own New York City, the global center of innovative urban thinking. The event's intimate setting at the Bronx Zoo and its multidisciplinary lineup of speakers, panels, and activities invigorated participants and fomented the kinds of productive discussions and practical solutions that cross-disciplinary collaboration strives for but too rarely achieves.

Wood at Work events began the afternoon before the conference, when Pilot Projects Director Scott Francisco and *Natural Areas Conservancy* President *Bram Gunther* led a walking tour open to all conference participants across the wood-planked Brooklyn Bridge and through important nearby natural areas, including a stand of 9/11 memorial "survivor trees." The tour concluded with a late afternoon reception at a Brooklyn restaurant.

Wood at Work was organized and curated by:



 **Wildlife Conservation Society**



 **The Hudson Company**



We are grateful to our sponsors:



Wood at Work participants take a walking tour of the wood-planked Brooklyn Bridge

The following morning, all participants met at the Bronx Zoo's Schiff Family Great Hall to convene the conference. In his introduction, Scott stressed the vital role of wood in the stories of both our cultural

development as humans and of our individual lives. He described wood as an inspiring building material that can function in cities as biological refuge, carbon sink, and cultural preserve.

You can [read summaries of all 30 speakers' talks](#), including keynotes by renowned architect and historian [Kenneth Frampton](#), [Lars Laestadius](#) of the [World Resources Institute](#), and forest ecologist [Robin Chazdon](#).

Our lunch break included time for attendees to participate in outdoor activities—such as a Japanese saw workshop led by Mokichi design studio founder [Yann Giguère](#) and a reclaimed wood display from Jamie Hammel of [The Hudson Company](#)—and indoor attractions, such as a samplable spread of tree foods and models of CLT (cross-laminated timber) products.

Following the conclusion of the speeches, a panel of participants discussed and shaped a resolution that was put forth and then signed by the majority:

1. New York and other cities are centers of leadership, policy innovation, culture, arts, and inspiration, and their decisions impact and influence global trends.
2. Thriving forest systems are a critical part of mitigating global climate change, as well as maintaining biodiversity, community livelihoods and identity, human health, and broader ecosystem services.
3. The use of sustainably harvested wood from well-managed, certified forest systems (including community managed forests) can significantly contribute to global forest and wildlife conservation and maintain the aesthetic and architectural qualities that only wood can provide.
4. We suggest that New York and other cities create policies to proactively promote the use of responsibly sourced wood in city building projects and infrastructure as part of their climate change initiatives, and to build civic awareness about the global importance of forests.

Speaker [Daniel Safarik](#), Director of the Asia Headquarters Office of the [Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat](#), concluded the discussion by expressing that the way statements are made in cities now is by doing something—in this case, by building something—not by talking about it. If New York City can act as a collective of eight million people to create the changes we want to see, he said, and we broadcast our successes through our powerful mass media, we will influence the world.



Architect Donald Chong described wood as a familiar material currency that’s shared across oceans

Attendees shared in more informal discussion over a wine and cheese reception, then some continued with dinner at a local restaurant.

As an event, *Wood at Work* exceeded our expectations: it was a vibrant, wonderful day of idea sharing by a group of dedicated environmental and cultural luminaries. But moving beyond that memorable day, we believe we have started something much bigger: a worldwide movement to use a simple, natural material—wood—to strongly link the building of healthy, sustainable cities with effective climate change mitigation and global forest conservation.

There's a lot to celebrate, and a lot of work ahead. We're planning to publish the results of the conference as proceedings and in academic journals; we're organizing a series of smaller, focused events throughout the coming year; we're looking for more partners and sponsors to support our work and to help maintain a *Wood at Work* presence year-round—and much more.

We welcome you to [learn more about Wood at Work on our website](#) and to [contact us](#) if you have questions, comments, or would like to join our mailing list.



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