



# The Forest Where We Live

A National Strategic Plan



The National Urban and Community  
Forestry Advisory Council

United States Department of Agriculture • Forest Service  
FS-543





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*"Trees outstrip most people in the depth and extent of their work for the public good."*

*from Sarah Ebenreck, The Value of Trees*

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Larry Rana/FS 82-CB-0982



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*Cities are "heat islands," and are about 5 to 9 degrees warmer than the surrounding areas. Trees cool parking lots and streets.*





## **Background**

More than 75 percent of all people in the United States live in towns and cities—and in urban forests. These forests consist of the community trees and plants, street and yard trees, shrubs, landscaping in commercial-industrial areas, parks, and other urban greenery.

### **Benefits of the Forests Where We Live**

Urban and community forests are economically important. They increase property values and boost tourism and local businesses.

As people live, work, and play among trees, they enjoy reduced air pollution, increased natural beauty, quieter communities, and a better quality of life. Urban and community forests provide more than 69 million acres of trees and open space—an ideal setting for recreation and wildlife habitat.

Community trees control urban water runoff and improve its quality. They conserve energy by cooling our "urban heat islands" through shade and water evaporating from their leaves. They also keep us warmer in winter by slowing harsh winds.

But perhaps the greatest benefit occurs when individuals and community groups plant, preserve, and enhance trees. In working with their trees they also begin to develop important conservation values. Often, more stable and revitalized neighborhoods follow.

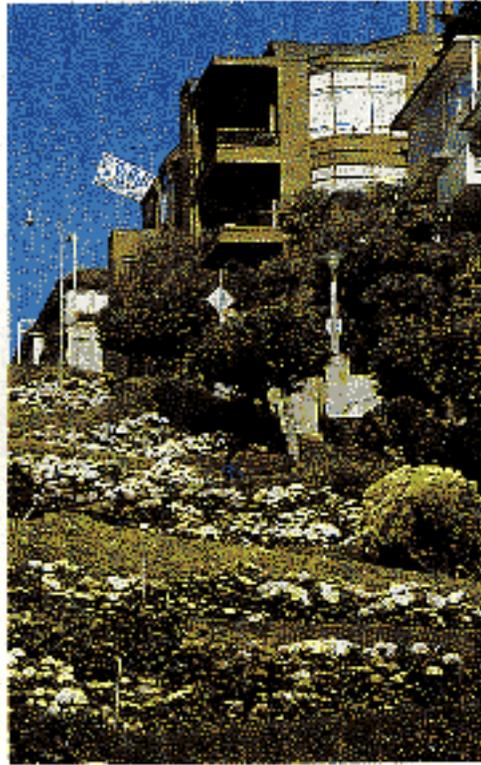
### **Why Develop a Strategic Plan?**

In the 1990 farm bill, Congress directed the Secretary of Agriculture to appoint the National Urban and Community Forestry Advisory Council to examine urban forestry issues. The council has developed a strategic plan and prepared this report to:

- Develop public policy on urban and community forestry.
- Provide information for the preparation of the 1995 farm bill.
- Encourage decisionmakers at all levels to recognize the urban forest's vital place in an urban infrastructure.
- Outline a future for urban and community forestry.



*Property placed  
and maintained  
trees and shrubs  
increase property  
values by 20  
percent.*





## Issues in Urban and Community Forestry

Two key sets of issues dominate urban and community forestry in the 1990's: No comprehensive program has been created for urban forests, and the trees are not thriving in many towns and cities.

### No National Comprehensive Program

Societal concern for urban and community forestry is increasing in both the private and public sectors, but many hurdles remain:

- No clear, national mandate has been established beyond the 1990 Farm Bill.
- Urban and community forest management receives low funding priority at all levels of government.
- Few colleges or universities offer a full degree in urban forestry.
- Each State and local government is left to deal with issues individually, without coordination.
- The full urban or community forest ecosystem, which includes humans, wildlife, and vegetation, is not recognized or clearly understood.
- Town and city officials fail to recognize tree and forests as an integral part of a municipal infrastructure or as a functional element in the urban landscape.
- Many city officials view urban and community forestry programs as mere beautification programs. They do not understand the social, economic, and environmental benefit of trees in an urban setting.

### Many Urban Forests Are Not Thriving

Urban and community forests are complex because humans interact with them. In all sizes of towns and cities, forests face these challenges:

- Only one tree is planted for every four removed in many communities, especially in newly developed areas.
- From 500 to 700 million tree planting spaces remain vacant.
- Because of improper planting and care, trees in difficult areas, such as center cities, live only an average of 7 years and rarely reach maturity.
- Compacted or paved ground creates high summer temperatures and prevents water from filtering in to reach tree roots.
- Thousands of acres of forested land are cleared for development with little concern for replacement.



## Legislative Mandate

The 1990 Farm Bill fundamentally changed this Nation's approach to managing urban and community forests. Section 1219, Urban and Community Forestry Assistance, amended the basic law, 16 U.S.C. 2105, the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act to:

- Expand the authority of the Forest Service to work with States to administer grants and technical assistance.
- Raise funding from \$2.7 million in 1990 to \$25 million in 1993. Current legislation places an upper limit of \$30 million on this program.
- Create a 15-member Urban and Community Forestry Advisory Council appointed by the Secretary of Agriculture.

The advisory council is unique because it draws members from all levels of government, grass roots citizen groups, industry and trade associations, and national nonprofit organizations. The council has three tasks:

- Develop a national urban and community forestry strategic plan.
- Evaluate how the strategic plan has been put into effect.
- Develop criteria and recommendations for an urban and community forestry challenge cost-share program.

## Vision and Mission Statements

### Vision

The National Urban and Community Forestry Advisory Council seeks to establish sustainable urban forests for all communities. These forests will provide jobs, healthier economies, stronger communities, and improved ecosystems.

### Mission

The council is established to encourage all sizes of towns and cities to properly plant, maintain, and preserve trees in greatly increasing numbers so that America's communities will have:

- Cooler summer air
- Warmer homes in winter
- Cleaner air and water
- Quieter streets
- More peaceful neighborhoods
- More community jobs
- Stronger urban economies
- An overall improved and expanded community environment for all Americans.



## Strategies

How can the council accomplish this mission in a practical way? Six strategies have been developed, including public outreach, municipal and volunteer programs, career training, funding, research, and private and public partnerships. All require a commitment to this Nation's towns and cities and to the people from many cultures who live in them.

### I—Public Outreach

**Goal:**

Cultivate an understanding and appreciation of the social, economic, environmental, and esthetic value of trees, forests, and related resources in cities and communities.

**Expanded explanation:**

This strategy has four audiences: youth, the general public, private enterprise, and public policy makers. Programs will be developed and tailored to the needs of the different audiences. The information must be directed toward the diversity of publics found in the Nation's towns and cities. Activities are designed to popularize information about urban and community forestry and not intended to address professionals in the field. Materials will be reviewed by a diverse group of professionals to ensure that different cultural values are represented. Information may be translated into languages other than English.

**Direction A:**

Develop information and education programs for youth audiences.

**Activities:**

- Develop manuals with urban forestry activities for grades K-12. Activities will take advantage of different media and will emphasize hands-on activities.
- Present curricula to teacher workshops so it may be taken back to the classroom. Consider working with Project Learning Tree to take advantage of the education networks that program already has in place.
- Develop activities for the curricula that incorporate programs like Arbor Day, Global ReLeaf, and other programs.
- Look for opportunities to present curricula to leaders of youth organizations and national professional educators associations.



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*"In short, a land ethic changes the role of Homo sapiens from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for his fellow-members, and also respect for the community as such."*

*from Aldo Leopold,  
A Sand County Almanac*



**Direction B:**

Develop information and education programs for the general public.

**Activities:**

- Use existing agencies and organizations to distribute urban and community forestry information.
- Develop new materials, appropriate for adults, consistent with the program created in this strategy.
- Market programs to gain widespread recognition and acceptance. Incorporate them into diverse State, local, and national publications.
- Develop low-cost computer information systems and networks and make them accessible to all publics.
- Encourage people to use proven, existing programs which can be updated and modified to meet local situations and opportunities.

**Direction C:**

Develop information and education programs for private enterprise.

**Activities:**

- Develop traditional and nontraditional cost/benefit data, including social, esthetic, economic, and environmental information.
- Develop strategies to make presentations and to distribute information through systems used by national and local businesses.

**Direction D:**

Develop information and educational programs for public policy.

**Activities:**

- Develop traditional and nontraditional cost/benefit data, including social, esthetic, economic, and environmental information.
- Develop ways to distribute information to all levels of decisionmakers by placing articles in national publications and making presentations.



USC&A'S 90-AS-0204

*"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed it's the only thing that ever has." Margret Mead*



91-AR-3643



## II—Municipal and Volunteer Programs

**Goal:**

Foster self-sustaining municipal and community volunteer programs.

**Expanded explanation:**

All communities must have high quality, self-sufficient programs to manage and protect urban and community forests. These programs must recognize forests and related resources as integral parts of the municipal infrastructure along with traditional items like streets, sidewalks, and water systems. Each local area has situations that require unique solutions, so a close partnership between local government and citizens is needed.

**Direction A:**

Strengthen and enhance agencies and organizations at the State and local level.

**Activities:**

- Promote the equal balance of government, private sector, and volunteers in local and State tree boards and advisory councils.
- Encourage participation in activities that build skills for working with volunteers.
- Offer seed money to start urban and community forestry projects.
- Identify and support superior programs.
- Present skill building programs about how to influence public policy.
- Develop new ways for nonprofit organizations and local governments to enhance one another.

**Direction B:**

Promote the urban forestry philosophy and programs to agencies, private industry, and local government officials.

**Activities:**

- Provide training materials for executives and elected and career local government officials, such as planners and public works employees.
- Promote urban and community forestry at state and national meetings of public officials.
- Write urban and community forestry articles for national and regional publications read by governmental officials.
- Enhance national programs for educating local government, such as Tree City USA, Global Releaf, and others.



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*A sound economy  
demands a healthy  
environment, and a  
healthy environment  
demands the skilled  
and caring hand of  
people.*



93-AR-3354



***Direction C:***

Increase participation in urban and community forestry planning and programs by individuals and private industry.

***Activities:***

- Develop technical assistance programs specifically for corporations and civic organizations.
- Encourage local governments and private industry to promote volunteer activities.
- Provide seed money to develop citizen volunteer groups. Groups must be equal-opportunity to receive money.
- Create programs to develop diversity in volunteer groups.

**III—Career Training**

***Goal:***

Coordinate and develop multicultural professional training and education programs for urban foresters, arborists, and others working in related disciplines.

***Expanded explanation:***

Urban forestry must be further developed into a distinct profession. It must emerge from the broader fields of forestry and horticulture to become its own professional discipline. Those working in the field need a clear career path and professional certification requirements and educational standards to provide career guidance. They need a continuing education system. Others in related fields, like public works employees and city managers, need training to understand their role in urban forestry.

***Direction A:***

Identify and promote educational, professional, and technical curricula for urban forestry professionals, using existing national professional organizations.

***Activities:***

- Develop a model curriculum for urban forestry education at the college and university level.
- Encourage professional groups to establish certification for professionals. Develop a system to support meeting national standards.
- Recruit to create diversity in the urban forestry profession.
- Support quality urban forestry curricula in vocational or technical secondary education programs.



**Direction B:**

Promote education for related professions like contractors, city planners, fire safety officials, and public works employees.

**Activities**

- Develop a training program for professionals in related fields.
- Develop a strategy to distribute training materials through organizations that support workers in professions related to urban forestry.

**IV—Funding**

**Goal:**

Stimulate additional funding from traditional and nontraditional sources.

**Expanded explanation:**

More must be known about the varied financial resources available to local communities for urban and community forests. Finding these sources and cataloging them for use will be a major step toward giving local citizens and governments a vision for a future with a healthy and vigorous forest. Any strategy to develop financial resources should include approaching environmental and urban renewal groups for support.

**Direction A:**

Provide information and make recommendations to Congress and the Secretary of Agriculture about traditional funding needs.

**Activities:**

- Prepare annual cost estimate of activities in the national strategic plan.
- Provide annual reports to Congress and the Secretary of Agriculture about progress in meeting objectives established in this strategic plan.
- Coordinate the collection and distribution of information to Congress and the Secretary of Agriculture about emerging urban forestry issues.

**Direction B:**

Promote private sector funding for urban forestry.

**Activities**

- Develop private and public partnership projects like Global ReLeaf.
- Provide local groups with a comprehensive model for private funding partnerships.



**Direction C:**

Identify nontraditional sources for urban forestry funding.

**Activities:**

- Catalog and publish sources of Federal Government funding applicable to urban and community forests.
- Seek and publish sources of funding available from private sources like foundations or utility companies.
- Approach environmental and urban renewal groups about funding urban and community forestry projects.

**Direction D:**

Educate local governmental officials and volunteer groups on the benefits of urban forestry and sources of funding.

**Activities:**

- Present information to agencies and local governments about the cost and benefit of urban and community forests.
- Identify and assess current funding at local levels.
- Help local governments to identify sources within their own communities.
- Develop a directory of public and private sources applicable to urban and community forestry funding.
- Train local government officials and volunteers in ways to seek and obtain funding from all sources.

**V—Research**

**Goal:**

Support significantly expanded research and assure widespread distribution of the findings.

**Expanded explanation:**

With more than 75 percent of the Nation's population living among urban and community forests, more extensive research is essential. Only a small amount of research has been done to investigate the benefit of trees in the urban environment. Related fields, like horticulture and rural forestry, continue to dominate research. A comprehensive research program to meet the needs of both private and public people is needed. A list of priorities for national urban forestry research is also needed, along with a thorough knowledge of current research. These findings must be translated into common language for those with no professional background in the field.



*In 50 years, one tree produces \$30,000 in oxygen, recycles \$35,000 in water, and removes \$60,000 of air pollution.*



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**Direction A:**

Periodically conduct a national needs assessment on urban forests and urban ecosystem research.

**Activities:**

- Assess the state of current research in urban and community forestry.
- Identify areas for new and expanded research.
- Work with nonprofit organizations and all levels of government to develop a strategy for research priorities.
- Provide and distribute a summary report on the findings.

**Direction B:**

Enhance, expand, and direct forestry-related institutions toward urban forestry research.

**Activities:**

- Encourage arboretums, universities, botanical gardens, and private research foundations to expand their research to include urban and community forestry.
- Encourage professionals in related fields, such as wildlife, horticulture, and the social sciences to expand research into the benefits and values of urban and community forestry.
- Encourage USDA agencies who oversee Hatch Act, Forest Service, and McIntire/Stennis research funds to significantly increase funding for urban and community forestry research.

**Direction C:**

Establish biological, social, and economic research priorities and establish a role for government research programs in urban and community forestry.

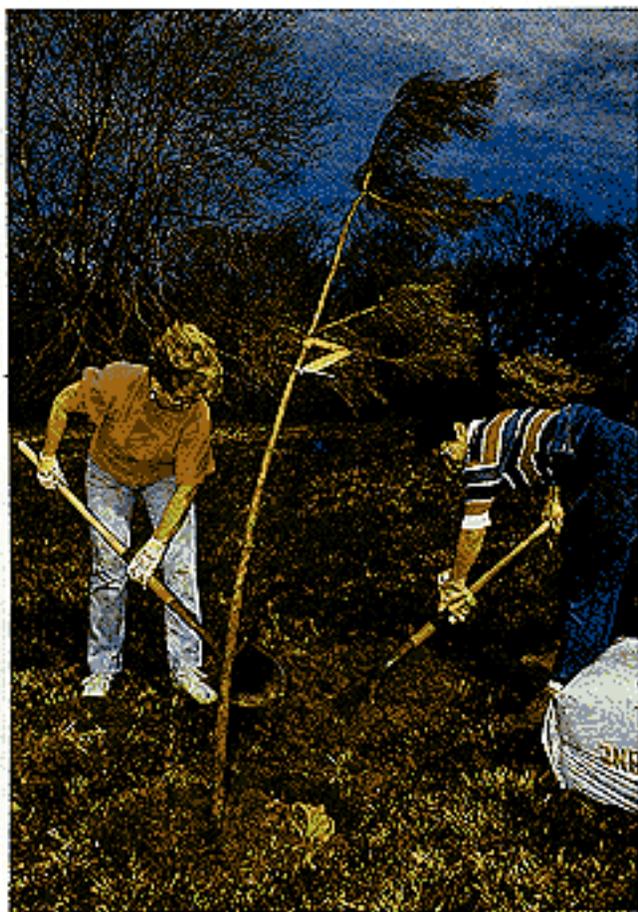
**Activities:**

- Adopt priorities established in the national research assessment.
- Urge USDA to adopt the budget recommendations of this council to complete the recommendations of the National Research Agenda for the United States in the 1990's, published in October 1991.
- Significantly increase intergovernmental research on urban and community forestry issues, incorporating research from agencies such as the Department of Energy and the Environmental Protection Agency.
- Expand partnerships for research with urban and community forestry programs.



93-43-3552

*A healthy urban forest indicates a healthy, viable community. A declining, deteriorating urban forest is one of the first indicators of a community in decline and decay.*



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**Direction D:**

Establish research priorities and processes for the private sector.

**Activities:**

- Encourage private industry and foundations to adopt and employ priorities established in the national research assessment.
- Urge the private sector to request additional urban and community forestry research from universities, arboreta, and their own research groups.
- Encourage the private sector to establish partnerships with government and foundations to do additional research in urban and community forestry.

**Direction E:**

Enhance and expand distribution of research information related to urban and community forestry.

**Activities:**

- Review research in other fields such as economic studies or the medical implications of urban and community forests, and distribute the findings to urban forestry professionals through an easily accessible clearinghouse.
- Establish a system to translate urban forestry research for people outside the profession.
- Use the USDA Extension Service and other agencies to distribute research findings.

## **VI—Private and Public Partnerships**

**Goal:**

Promote partnerships with the private sector.

**Expanded explanation:**

Government cannot improve urban and community forestry by itself. Private citizens, corporations, and nonprofit organizations must contribute by investigating ways to improve the economic viability and living environment of towns and cities. Although volunteers, professionals, and local governments can provide leadership, more funding and initiative must come from the private sector. Successful programs developed by the private sector can help encourage other urban and community forestry projects by motivating citizens and corporations.

**Direction A:**

Explore new and innovative ways to make investment in urban and community forestry economically viable.



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**Activities:**

- Develop a venture capital fund for use by urban and community forestry businesses.
- Continue and increase Federal appropriation for the Small Business Administration to target funding for small businesses in all aspects of urban and community forestry.

**Direction B:**

Expand and enhance outreach programs for large corporations, small businesses, nonprofit organizations, community groups, homeowner groups, and individuals to become involved in urban and community forestry.

**Activities:**

- Distribute information about successful model programs through publications, meetings and conventions, and professional associations of these target groups.

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