

Ten-Year Urban Forestry Action Plan: 2016-2026

A policy statement approved by resolution
of the National Association of State Foresters



Introduction

Community forests comprise 39% of the nation's tree cover and provide critical "green infrastructure" across the country. They are made up of trees of all shapes and sizes – lining neighborhood streets, shading yards, and defining parks – in every neighborhood, town, and city across America. Collectively, every year community forests provide \$18.3 billion in cost savings related to reductions in air pollution, energy use, and greenhouse gases. Community forests help create networks of green spaces that provide a wide range of ecosystem services, and can even mitigate the effects of extreme weather and a changing climate. Their value appreciates and grows year after year, making planting and caring for community trees a truly wise investment.

Background

2015 marked the 25th anniversary of the Forestry Title in the 1990 Farm Bill that established or enhanced several key cooperative programs: Urban and Community Forestry, Forest Stewardship, and Forest Legacy. These partnership programs represent a concerted federal investment to conserve non-federal public and private forestland.

NASF and its members have worked cooperatively with the USDA Forest Service (Forest Service) and other partners to conserve and sustain working forest landscapes, protect forests from harm, and enhance public benefits from trees and forests. These efforts included development of state, territory and District of Columbia Forest Action Plans (FAP) that represent a collective strategic plan for the nation's forests. They offer practical, long-term plans for investing state, federal, and other resources where they can be most effective in achieving national conservation goals.

In 2015, the US Forest Service National Urban and Community Forestry Advisory Council (Council), in compliance with Farm Bill requirements, released a [National Urban and Community Forestry Action Plan](#) (Plan) developed in collaboration with an inclusive and diverse representation of key community forestry stakeholders. This Plan provides a platform for a national agenda that will help all communities create urban and community forests that are diverse, healthy and resilient, and accessible for all citizens. While the Council will use the Plan to guide development of its future competitive grant categories, we believe the Plan has broader value beyond the Council to positively impact the Forest Service's (and others) urban and community forestry activities.

The 10-Year Plan: Vision, Mission, Goals and Strategies 2016-2026 (from the Final Action Plan Summary)

The National Ten-Year Urban and Community Forestry Action Plan is developed by and for the urban forestry community. The plan's purpose is to expand awareness of the benefits that our urban forests, including green infrastructure, provide to communities throughout the nation, and increase investments in these urban forest resources for the benefit of current and future generations. The plan provides specific goals, actions, and recommendations for improving the status of urban and community forestry for the United States and its territories. The plan also identifies research needs, messaging and communications needs, and innovative funding and collaborative opportunities for urban forestry initiatives.

Notably, this plan also serves as a framework for funding and recommends a consistent and annually increasing funding level for the U&CF Program. The urban forestry community, including the Forest Service and other applicable Federal agencies, are to use the Action Plan as a guide to implement and expand urban and community forestry through 2026.

Plan Vision

Urban and community forests increase sustainability, wellness, and resilience in all communities.

Plan Mission

Help all communities create urban and community forests that are diverse, healthy, and accessible for all citizens.

Overarching Principles

1. Advance Health and Wellness of Forests, Ecosystems, and People.
2. Maximize Community and Ecosystem Sustainability.
3. Build Community and Natural Ecosystem Resilience.

Plan Goals

Goal 1. Integrate Urban and Community Forestry Into all Scales of Planning

For the full range of human and environmental benefits of urban forest systems to be realized, cities need to be planned with natural systems as a core feature of community infrastructure, instead of an afterthought, for optimal communities' future growth, health, and well-being. Urban and community forestry systems are an important integral component at all system levels: neighborhood, local, community, regional, watershed, and bioregional. For maximum effectiveness and benefit, urban and community forestry systems need to be planned and managed at the community, state, and regional scales as well as integrated into other city systems, such as transportation, housing, and infrastructure.

Strategies for Goal 1:

- Support inclusion of trees and forests as elements of all community comprehensive and master planning efforts
- Support the integration of urban forestry into all scales of city, regional, and state-scale master plans
- Launch a public awareness and education campaign to elevate recognition of the value of urban trees and urban forests ecosystems as essential contributors to community sustainability and resilience
- Increase community capacity to use urban trees and forestry in public space planning, infrastructure, and private development

Targets for Goal 1:

- A suite of regional planning tools are developed and disseminated to assist and encourage regional planning that integrates urban forestry into planning efforts
- Criteria and benchmarks for measuring sustainability are made available to cities and communities
- A standard measure for urban forestry and green infrastructure benefits is adopted and disseminated for widespread use

Goal 2. Promote the Role of Urban and Community Forestry in Human Health and Wellness

Due to the high costs of disease treatment and therapies, health professionals are becoming more interested in innovative strategies for health promotion and disease prevention. An extensive range of research demonstrates significant relationships between experiences of nearby nature in cities, including trees, and positive health response. The depth of evidence supports the need for actively improving human health and welfare through urban and community forestry.

Strategies for Goal 2:

- Expand opportunities for collaboration with the health community
- Champion a nationwide marketing campaign that links trees to human health and wellness
- Plan, design and manage urban forests to improve human health and wellness
- Develop tools to improve and highlight the relationship between improved public health, wellness, and urban and community forestry and green infrastructure

Targets for Goal 2:

- Major social media providers (such as Facebook) advertise the benefits of urban forests. Federal, state and local urban forestry interests participate in providing web-based advertising on benefits of urban forestry and green infrastructure
- Tools to measure the positive impacts of urban forestry on human health and wellness are made widely available to communities
- The benefits of urban forestry and green infrastructure for human health, wellness and productivity are promoted through partnerships with the health community
- Investments in urban forestry are made by health organizations to reduce healthcare costs and improve health outcomes
- A minimum daily dose of “Vitamin Tree” is developed and disseminated through health practitioners

Goal 3. Cultivate Diversity, Equity, and Leadership Within the Urban Forestry Community

The urban forestry community should embody the changing demographics of our nation, and its cities, towns and counties. The next Ten-Year Urban Forestry Action Plan must continue to focus on addressing the needs of underserved communities. There is an urgent need to increase diversity within the urban forestry community, both at the professional level and among the citizen leadership that drives the urban and community forestry agenda forward. Urban and community forestry needs to be seen as a progressive, innovative and inclusive profession at all levels, from entry level to senior leadership. Over the next ten years, a new professional cadre that is culturally, ethnically and economically diverse must emerge from an expanding network of vocational programs in high school, community colleges and professional certified university programs. Vocal and visible champions need to be developed at all levels in the next decade to bring attention to the ability of urban forests to offer comprehensive and cost-effective solutions to critical community issues and to apply those solutions within their own communities. In the federal structure, urban and community forestry need to deliver strategies and programs for existing and anticipated challenges by coordinating the work of multiple agencies and leveraging their resources to promote equity and diversity in urban and community forestry.

Strategies for Goal 3:

- Increase diversity, equity, and accessibility in urban and community forestry
- Engage underserved communities in urban and community forestry
- Develop effective leadership at all levels to build a national voice for urban forestry.
- Increase workforce development opportunities and green jobs in urban and community forestry, with particular attention to underserved communities
- Promote expanded collaboration, training and communication within the field of urban and community forestry to build workforce professional development

Targets for Goal 3:

- The principles of diversity and inclusion are widely adopted by local, state, federal government offices managing urban forestry, as well as foundations and non-profit organizations
- Tools to measure deficiencies in ecosystem services across communities are developed and used by government agencies and community organizations to target urban forestry investments
- Youth are introduced to the full range of education, employment and community development opportunities available in the urban forestry sector
- The range of jobs offered in urban forestry that are publicly characterized as “green jobs” has measurably increased

Goal 4. Strengthen Urban and Community Forest Health and Biodiversity for Long-Term Resilience

Increasing urban and community forest and green infrastructure health, biodiversity and resilience are urgent needs, particularly as invasive species, pests, drought and challenges associated with climate change, such as extreme weather events, will offer both key challenges and opportunities in the next ten years. Native and drought tolerant street trees are important to create stability and functional food webs for a diverse array of animals, insects, birds and people. Knowledge of regionally-adapted pest and insect-resistant species needs to be developed and disseminated.

Strategies for Goal 4:

- Increase the biodiversity, health, and resilience of trees in urban and community forests
- Foster resilience, restoration, and sustainability of urban and community forests facing climate change challenges
- Support use of urban forests for increasing community food resilience and access to local foods

Targets for Goal 4:

- Tools and comprehensive data are developed and widely disseminated that enable communities to map projected climate change, create management plans for increased resilience, and plan for the use of native and regionally adopted trees, shrubs and perennials
- An integrated network of training technology and talent helps communities respond to and recover from severe storm events
- Food forest plans (including fruits, berries, nuts and foraged foods) are made widely available to communities

Goal 5. Improve Urban and Community Forest Management, Maintenance, and Stewardship

The expansion of innovative technologies in the last decade is expected to continue, and will provide new important opportunities for improving the urban and community forest management, arboricultural practices and increased urban natural resources stewardship skills. Appropriate design and maintenance are core needs for optimizing urban and community forest ecosystem services. As our urban and community forests continue to grow, stewardship in future decades will require community engagement and support, which in turn will require the development of new stewardship programs. Additionally, key research findings and new technologies need to be made

more accessible and relevant to leaders, decision makers, educators and practitioners for enhancing more effective and responsive urban natural resources stewardship.

Strategies for Goal 5:

- Improve urban and community forest management, maintenance, and arboricultural practices
- Develop comprehensive programs, policies, and resources for enhancing urban forestry stewardship
- Promote better use of technology and tools in urban forestry
- Facilitate expanded research and delivery of scientific findings to all stakeholders

Targets for Goal 5:

- An urban Forestry and Green Infrastructure “scorecard” is developed and widely disseminated to enable communities to measure progress and success
- A nationwide urban tree census is conducted in 2020
- Tools are created to project tree growth patterns and measure structural soundness to improve maintenance decisions and reduce risks associated with urban trees
- National nonprofits provide recognition to cities, towns and counties with certified community forestry management

Goal 6. Diversify, Leverage, and Increase Funding for Urban and Community Forestry

In the last decade, the majority of states have lost federal funding for urban and community forestry. To make matters worse, while funds have decreased, needs are continuing to escalate due to urban resilience and climate change challenges. Attention to funding the growing urban forestry needs is essential as the majority of America now live in urban areas, and movement to cities and urbanized areas is expected to continue over the next decade. To facilitate an understanding of why urban and community forestry funding should be a top funding priority, a message must be strategically crafted to communicate how urban and community forestry is a cost-effective, core solution to numerous urgent and complex urban challenges in environmental and human health. Communication is key, as urban and community forestry could and should become a “go-to” tool to help address the myriad issues that are better funded, such as health, economic development, and resilience. There is a need to expand collaboration between urban forestry and related fields, such as forged partnerships with healthcare professions and community designers and developers. Specifically, there is a need to foster federal inter-agency collaboration to leverage funding and strategies from within the USDA Forest Service, as well as to foster inter-professional collaboration outside of the USDA Forest Service. Funding strategies that will be important to develop in the next decade include supporting young or developing state and local programs, developing incentive programs, rewarding exemplary efforts, and funding public awareness campaigns.

Strategies for Goal 6:

- Increase funding and grants for urban and community forestry
- To leverage and diversify funding, expand collaboration between urban forestry and related fields, agencies, and sectors

Targets for Goal 6:

- Funding for urban forestry is broad, deep and stable, reflecting the multiple challenges that it addresses, with a growing percentage funding from nontraditional channels (resilience, climate, health, food, urban forest products)
 - Increasing the annual investment in urban and community forestry is an important first step towards unlocking its true value and one all need to support to help advance the other Goals of this 10-year plan
- Federal programs relating to urban forestry are working together to increase their collective impact and expand urban tree canopy
- The urban forestry community has developed public-private partnerships with major corporations that want to be associated with the environmental, health and community benefits derived from urban ecosystems

Goal 7. Increase Public Awareness and Environmental Education to Promote Stewardship

Urban and community forests are key infrastructure at the regional, municipal, neighborhood, and home scale across America, and more public education is needed to provide informed decision making and support for the development and maintenance of our urban and community forests.

Strategies for Goal 7:

- Create environmental education programs that focus on urban and community forestry issues.
- Create a nationwide urban forestry public awareness and education campaign
- Increase engagement of underserved and minority communities in urban forestry establishment and stewardship

Targets for Goal 7:

- A national education campaign galvanizes political, corporate and popular support for the economic, health and environmental benefits developed by urban and community forestry
- An on-line platform is developed and used to track stewardship activities, measure their impacts, aggregate results, and connect stewards locally and nationally
- An expanded environmental education curriculum incorporating urban forestry is widely adopted by school systems nationwide

Conclusion

The 2016–2026 Ten-Year Action Plan is built on sound principles and challenging goals, supported by rigorous science and research. Those principles, goals and benefits will not be realized without an investment commensurate with the enormous value of the urban forest. Even with a \$2.4 trillion structural value delivering \$18.3 billion in annual benefits, the urban forest remains an underappreciated asset.

Ensuring that Urban and Community Forestry Programs keep pace with urbanization and the resulting expanded need for urban forestry services will require identifying, diversifying, and leveraging additional sources of funding. In addition, continuing support is needed to standardize, account for, and communicate both the funding investments being made in urban and community forestry, as well as the ecosystem services and benefits that urban forests provide. On a regional and national level, being able to more precisely speak to true costs, ecosystem services, and benefit measurements will enable urban and community forestry's strong network of implementers, policy makers, and grassroots support organizations to better communicate urban

and community forestry's value, community impacts, and return on investment, to the urban forestry community external stakeholders, and the breadth of funding sources.

The members of the National Association of State Foresters urge the Forest Service and other national Urban & Community Forestry organizations to continue to use the collectively developed and approved Forest Action Plans and National Urban and Community Forestry Action Plan: 2016-2026 as framework documents for strategic, program and budget direction of the Forest Service Urban and Community Forestry Program.

This Policy Statement was adopted at the NASF Annual Meeting in September 2019 and will remain in effect until September 2024 unless otherwise revised or renewed.