



# Urban and Community Forestry: WHY FEDERAL SUPPORT IS CRUCIAL



## What are urban and community forests?

Urban and 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.**

Urban and community forests help create networks of green spaces that provide a wide range of ecosystem services that can even mitigate the effects of extreme weather and a changing climate. Their value grows year after year, making planting and caring for community trees a truly wise investment.

### Trees improve quality of life.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that the public health benefits derived from regular exposure to natural environments are significant and especially important to urbanites. Likewise, time spent among trees is linked to better health outcomes.

### Trees encourage consumer spending.

Shoppers spend 9% to 12% more for goods and services in central business districts that have high-quality tree canopies. Shoppers also travel greater distances to visit these districts and spend more time there once they arrive.

### Trees boost home values and tax revenue.

The presence of larger trees in yards and on streets can increase home values by 3% to 15%. In Portland, Oregon, specifically, street and yard trees have increased home values by about \$1.35 billion and property tax revenues by \$15.3 million.

### Trees reduce heating and cooling costs.

Urban and community forests across the U.S. reduce electricity use by 7.2% or 38.8 million MWh (worth \$4.7 billion annually) and heating use by 246 million MMBtus (worth \$3.1 billion annually).



## Urban and community forests are at risk.

Invasive species, severe storms, extreme weather, and development pressures are eroding community forest resources across the country. Nationally, 175,000 acres (or 36 million trees) of community forests worth *\$96 million in benefits* are lost every year, limiting communities' ability to meet environmental requirements and reducing Americans' quality of life.

Natural disasters, such as hurricanes and wildfires, often overwhelm the resources of communities and require substantial federal assistance to respond adequately. Sound, long-term federal and state investment in community forestry programs reduces the costs of natural disaster recovery.

## Additional federal investment is needed.

State forestry agencies work in partnership with the USDA Forest Service to provide critical assistance to communities in establishing and managing local community forest resources. These investments, made available to states through the Urban and Community Forestry (UCF) Program, are leveraged with state funds—at a rate of 2:1 on average—and improve the quality of life for millions of Americans every year.

The UCF Program was delivered in new and innovative ways in 2020 and benefitted Americans in cities and towns across the continental United States and its island territories. With these investments, we've realized a rise in community-based forestry jobs, local property values, and overall quality of life. More investments in urban and community forests could:

- Save the United States up to \$11.7 billion in avoided health care costs annually
- Boost high school graduates' lifelong income by \$1.3 billion annually
- Avoid \$928 million in costs resulting from crimes annually

Tens of millions of trees are decimated by insects and disease every year; and hundreds of thousands more are lost to storms. These tree losses (and the costs of replanting them) are most pronounced in economically disadvantaged cities and towns.

With help from the UCF Program, communities of all shapes and sizes can curb these threats and maintain valuable green infrastructure with science-based, active management and proper disaster planning, response, and recovery.

# The federal UCF Program helps.

In FY 2020, the federal UCF Program received an increase of \$2.5 million in congressional appropriations. Despite pandemic-related shutdowns, cancellations, and postponements, the 2020 program provided 203,463,294 people and 7,589 communities with educational, technical, and/or financial assistance. Additionally, over 1,283,000 hours of volunteer service were donated in support of UCF-funded projects.



**The South—along with a few states in the Northeast and Midwest**—continued to lead the way in Urban Forest Strike Teams, not only for hurricane-related recovery, but urban tree pest response protocols and training.



**Vermont, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Montana, and Colorado** built on innovative ways to not only deal with emerald ash borer infestations (EAB), but to proactively prepare and begin implementing plans in advance of EAB, including expanding ash wood utilization.



**In the great Northwest, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington** are enhancing readiness and rapid responses to invasive tree pests in their state's community forests.

**Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico, and Arizona** are working together on an urban tree improvement program to help diversify urban and community forests in these tough environments to grow trees.

**Utah, California, Hawaii, and Alaska** received UCF Program funding for tree planting, reforestation, and invasive species projects.

