

Alaska Community Forestry Program Strategy

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Community Forestry is Nationwide Program

Congress established the Urban and Community Forestry Program to improve the condition and extent of community trees and forests in cities, suburbs and towns nationwide. It encourages states to provide information and technical assistance to local governments and others that will encourage cooperative efforts to plan urban forestry programs and to plant, protect, maintain, and use wood from trees in open spaces, greenbelts, roadside screens, parks, woodlands, and residential areas.

Urban and Community Forestry is the comprehensive management of forests and related natural resources in populated areas. These include the inner city, the developing fringe of cities and towns, and communities of various sizes.

The purposes of the Urban and Community Forestry Program, as stated in the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act of 1978 (as amended), are to:

1. Improve understanding of the benefits of preserving existing tree cover in urban areas and communities;
2. Encourage owners of private residences and commercial properties to maintain trees and expand forest cover on their properties;
3. Provide education programs and technical assistance to state and local organizations (including community associations and schools) in maintaining forested lands and individual trees in urban and community settings and identifying appropriate tree species and sites for expanding forest cover;
4. Provide assistance through competitive matching grants awarded to local units of government, approved organizations or other local community tree volunteer groups, for urban and community forestry projects;
5. Implement a tree planting program to complement urban and community tree maintenance and open space programs;
6. Promote the establishment of demonstration projects to illustrate the benefits of maintaining and creating forest cover and trees;
7. Enhance the technical skills and understanding of sound tree maintenance and arboricultural practices; and
8. Expand existing research and educational efforts intended to improve the understanding of tree and forest ecology; the value of trees and ground covers; economic, environmental, social and psychological benefits of trees and forest cover in urban and community areas; and the role of trees in conserving energy and mitigating urban heat islands.

The USDA Forest Service provides national leadership and state forestry agencies provide direction, networks, program management, and technical, financial, and educational assistance statewide. The program relies on cooperation among agencies, local and tribal governments, the private sector, not-for-profit and community-based organizations, educational institutions, and the Forest Service to promote understanding and management of community forests and related natural resources. State councils advise the State Forester on program direction and priorities.

Assistance, including conservation education, must focus on trees, forests, open spaces, greenbelts, and related natural resources such as soil, water, air, and wildlife. Activities and projects include the planning and management of trees, forests, open spaces, greenbelts and related natural resources in communities.

The Forest Service has set four requirements for states to receive federal funding, which may be met in a variety of ways to best meet state needs:

1. An urban and community forestry program coordinator
2. Volunteer/partnership coordination
3. An urban and community forestry council
4. A state program strategic plan (five-year plan)

ALASKA COMMUNITY FORESTRY PROGRAM

In 1991 the Alaska Department of Natural Resources joined the nationwide effort to help communities improve the condition of their trees and forests through effective management. The Division of Forestry, through a partnership with the Forest Service, receives federal funds to administer the state's Community Forestry Program. A full-time coordinator and community assistance forester provide technical and educational assistance to communities, tree care professionals, volunteer organizations, businesses, and universities.

The Alaska Community Forest Council helps determine goals and priorities of the program and provides expertise and advice to the Division of Forestry. The 15 members represent the geographic diversity of the state and a broad spectrum of interests and experiences.

Supporting community forestry is an important and appropriate role for state government because:

1. Community forests provide essential benefits we cannot live without.
2. A healthy community forest doesn't happen by chance; it is the result of proper planning, management, and community investment.
3. Healthy community forests can help solve many community problems.
4. Community forests and rural forests are connected; good management of one helps the other.

The rapid population growth and development that has occurred in Alaska since 1990 makes it imperative that the Division of Forestry build a greater awareness of, and commitment to, community forest management. Invasive species, urban/wildland fire, forest cover loss, urban sprawl, public health, water quality, air pollution, and climate change are just a few of the critical issues that community forestry positively addresses. A relatively small financial investment produces big dividends for communities and direct benefits to Alaskans. On a larger scale, when communities expand and improve forests locally, conditions improve globally.

The 2008 Farm Bill established three national themes for State and Private Forestry, which the Alaska Community Forestry Program will address as follows:

1. **Conserve working forest land:** increase the number of sustainable programs that protect, manage, and expand community forests.
2. **Protect forests from harm:** assist land managers to conduct inventories and develop and implement management plans and practices that address forest health, invasive species, fragmentation, wildfire, and other threats to forests.
3. **Enhance public benefits from trees and forests:** assist communities to protect and maximize ecosystem services provided by forests such as clean air and water, productive wildlife habitat,

locally produced wood products and biomass, and recreation areas. Effective management provides a better return on the funds invested by local governments in trees and forests.

Mission

The mission of the Alaska Community Forestry Program is to ***help communities build effective, self-sustaining community forestry programs with strong local support.***

Community forest sustainability is measured by how well the network of trees, forests, and related natural resources contribute to human quality of life in cities and villages. Sustainable management can help solve landscape-scale problems that affect thousands of Alaskans: threats to air and water quality, climate change, energy consumption, loss of resources to urbanization and fragmentation, and natural disasters.

Five-Year Plan

The Alaska Community Forestry Program will focus its efforts on three areas of need. Each area requires a different approach and level of state service.

1. Communities that have initiated community forestry programs but need technical and financial assistance to grow and sustain effective programs;
2. Communities that have the potential for but currently have no, or limited, management programs for trees and forests;
3. Communities where forest management is important to quality of life but establishing a formal program with professional staff is unlikely due to the community's size, structure, or lack of resources.

Goal 1: Support community development that maintains and enhances benefits provided by trees and forests.

Objective 1: Assist communities in devising reasonable, affordable, and effective ways in which to grow, develop, and protect their communities while integrating the important contributions made by forest ecosystems and other natural areas.

- a) Participate in local and regional planning efforts that impact or influence management of community trees and forests.
- b) Measure baseline tree canopy for the largest population centers using high-resolution imagery.
- c) Support efforts to calculate the structure, environmental effects, and values of community forests using computer-generated models.
- d) Encourage best practices for protecting high-value forest landscapes in and around communities.
- e) Help communities assess and prioritize forest landscapes based on the services and benefits they provide as intact ecosystems.
- f) Bolster research that quantifies economic and environmental benefits that community trees provide when they are appropriately sited, planted, and maintained.
- g) Provide technical assistance to communities for adopting effective tree management and protection ordinances and policies.

Objective 2: Build support for community forestry among policy makers, community leaders, and the public.

- a) Demonstrate how trees provide economic, environmental, and social benefits greater than their cost when they are selected, planted, and maintained appropriately.
- b) Bring public attention to successful community forestry projects, programs, leaders, and partners.
- c) Increase awareness of development practices that conserve critical forest land, habitat, and air and water quality in communities.

Goal 2: *Protect and improve environmental services provided by community trees and forests*

Objective 1: Improve air quality

- a) Participate in activities to help communities meet federal air quality standards by incorporating trees and forests.
- b) Encourage voluntary or enforceable measures to increase tree canopy or prevent its destruction.

Objective 2: Improve water quality.

- a) Support stream restoration programs in communities, with an emphasis on mitigation of impaired waterways, as defined by the Department of Environmental Conservation.
- b) Work with communities to protect high-value forest tracts along waterways.
- c) Encourage practices and standards that limit the amount of runoff and pollutants that enter water bodies.
- d) Analyze cumulative impacts and help communities establish targets for impervious surfaces.
- e) Promote best practices for redevelopment in areas that exceed targets for impervious surfaces.
- f) Work with local storm water utility managers and public works directors on policies that value the contribution of urban trees and forests toward storm water management.

Objective 3: Help communities establish large-scale tree planting goals and plans.

- a) Support efforts to prioritize tree planting locations based on environmental benefits.
- b) Develop a tracking tool for communities to monitor progress towards achieving planting goals.
- c) Partner with electric utility providers to promote planting the right tree in the right place near utility lines.

Goal 3: *Build community forestry program capacity at the local level*

Objective 1: Establish professional urban forester and arborist positions in Alaska communities.

- a) Offer grants to sustain professional positions in high-priority communities.
- b) Create opportunities for professional development in urban forestry and arboriculture.
- c) Increase the number of Certified Arborists and Certified Municipal Specialists through ISA statewide.

Objective 2: Support effective and sustainable local community forest management

- a) Secure data required to measure tree canopy, assess forest condition and extent over time, and to quantify environmental services provided by trees and forests.

- b) Offer grants and assistance to complete working tree inventories and develop workable management plans.
- c) Assist in development of effective local risk management programs for trees.
- d) Support development of effective tree care and tree protection ordinances and policies.
- e) Encourage the adoption and use of industry standards and best management practices.
- f) Promote Tree City USA.

Objective 3: Offer technical and educational services to private sector nursery; arboriculture; and landscape design, installation, and maintenance firms.

- a) Encourage local tree care companies to obtain ISA Certified Arborist and Tree Worker credentials and training.
- b) Offer tree safety and tree worker training classes in larger Alaska communities.
- c) Foster development of tree nurseries in Alaska and adoption of high standards for quality.
- d) Promote Tree Line USA.

Objective 4: Strengthen local community forestry citizen groups

- a) Help state and local non-profit groups develop capacity to complete large-scale tree planting and maintenance projects.
- b) Provide education and assistance to local tree boards and tree non-profit groups.
- c) Aid in expansion of pool of community forestry volunteers.

Objective 5: Maintain and expand partnerships with universities

- a) Expand use of interns for community forest management and research.
- b) Support incorporation of urban forestry and arboriculture courses into Alaska university curricula.
- c) Promote Tree Campus USA program.

Goal 4: Build a Sustainable and Effective State Program.

Objective 1: Engage a diverse set of partners to strengthen sustainable community forestry programs.

- a) Maintain current and establish new partnerships to support community forest management and to provide education, training, and information.
- b) Expand communication and partnerships within the Division of Forestry, Resources, Fire, and Cooperative Programs, to meet common goals.
- c) Increase networking, communication, cross-training, and understanding among local governments, state and federal agencies, arborists, planners, landscape architects, builders, and others who manage or impact community trees and forests.
- d) Maintain a strong, active, and diverse Alaska Community Forest Council

Objective 2: Maintain professional staff and a sustainable budget

- a) Identify and pursue more diverse funding for state program administration, delivery, and community grants.
- b) Keep current on state and national urban and community forestry issues, legislation, and practices.

- c) Produce a work plan and accomplishment report annually that implements the five-year strategy.

Performance Outcomes

- Communities develop and sustain programs to manage their community trees and forests to effectively and efficiently meet local needs.
- Communities are served by community forestry professionals and a professional tree care industry.
- Communities participate in tree planting and other conservation activities that contribute to the quality of life, the environment, and the economy.
- Communities have plans that mitigate risks and prepare for catastrophic events.
- Communities benefit from local forest management that helps conserve energy and provides local biomass as an energy source.

Performance Measures

Performance measures for activities funded by the U.S.D.A. Forest Service that are assessed and reported each year:

- Number of people and percent of state population living in communities **managing** programs to plant, protect, and maintain their community trees and forests.
- Number of people and percent of state population living in communities **developing** programs and/or activities to plant, protect, and maintain their community trees and forests.
- Number of people living in communities provided educational, technical, and/or financial assistance.
- Number of communities with active community tree and forest management plans developed from professionally-based resource assessments and inventories.
- Number of communities that employ, or retain through written agreement, the services of professional forestry staff to advise and/or assist in planting, protection, and maintenance of community trees and forest. Staff will have at least one of these credentials: (1) degree in forestry or related field and (2) ISA certified arborist or equivalent professional certification.
- Number of communities that have adopted and can present documentation of local or statewide ordinances or policies that focus on planting, protecting, and maintaining community trees and forests.
- Number of communities with local advocacy/advisory organizations, such as active tree boards, commissions, or non-profit organizations that are formalized or chartered to advise and/or advocate for the planting, protection, and maintenance of community trees and forests.
- Number of hours of volunteer service.
- State administered community grants in current fiscal year and the number of communities that received financial assistance.
- Amount of U.S.D.A. Forest Service funding provided to the state.
- U.S.D.A. Forest Service dollar cost or expenditure per capita in communities assisted.