



# Managing the Forests Where We Live: An Assessment of Washington State Cities



It's hard to know where you are going if you don't know where you are! The Washington State Department of Natural Resources provides technical and financial assistance to communities of all sizes throughout the state to help build their urban forestry programs. What has been achieved?

An assessment of our cities' urban forestry programs was done by the University of Washington in three phases from 2001 to 2004. Here are the results . . . .

## Trees are More than Beautification . . . .

Street and park trees were once the focus of urban forestry programs in cities and towns. Communities are becoming more interested in achieving sustainability. We now know that the urban forest can be a part of all the places where people live, work, play, and learn in cities. Scientific studies have helped us to understand that trees provide many benefits, in many ways. Here's a sample of results from studies done by university and government scientists.

Trees contribute to the local economy:

- residential property values are enhanced by up to 20% by the presence of trees
- rental rates are up to 7% higher for commercial office properties having a quality landscape
- consumers report being willing to spend up to 12% more in central business districts having large trees
- desk workers with a view of nature report less illness and greater job satisfaction
- talented workers and firms are drawn to places that have high levels of amenities and environmental quality

Trees provide environmental services:

- better water quality and improved stormwater management
- cooling of paved surfaces which reduces heat island effects
- energy savings in summer cooling and winter heating
- improved air quality
- wildlife habitat and healthier salmon streams

Trees provide human services and health benefits:

- urban neighborhoods having trees and landscape experience lower crime rates
- patients in hospitals who have views of nature from their beds recover faster
- experiences of nearby nature reduce stress response (including driving and commuting)
- children diagnosed with ADHD show reduced symptoms after spending time in outdoor green spaces

# How Do We Create Better Urban and Community Forests?

The U.S. Forest Service estimates that Washington State has 93,272,000 urban trees. Successful planning and management for trees in cities involves a comprehensive approach. Five core elements are important for a good municipal forestry program:

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## Tree Inventory

A tree inventory is a database that enables city staff to record, then plan for, the health and character of the forest. It may contain data on each tree (on public property), or data about canopy cover across all properties (using satellite pictures or aerial photography). Most cities record their inventory as a data layer in a GIS system. Inventory data can be linked to work plans so that field work is efficient and effective. An inventory also helps with annual budgeting and accomplishment reporting.

## Forest Management Plan

A tree or forest management plan provides policy guidance for the use of a tree inventory and other tools, as it directs resources to the greatest forest needs. A good plan considers the full scope of a community's forest, communicates mission and goals for city staff and the public, and takes a long-range view of forest health. Fiscal, staff, and program budget needs are identified and prioritized by a plan. Plans are often a joint effort of community stakeholders and city staff.

## Routine Tree Care

Routine tree care gives the greatest returns for public spending on trees. Scheduled fieldwork should include tree planting and removal, pruning, mulching, disease

treatments, mitigation of infrastructure conflicts, and hazard tree assessment. Tree care in many cities is done on-demand in response to citizens, or after emergencies (such as wind storms). On-demand tree work means that crews will move among scattered sites, resulting in greater expense per treated tree.

## Tree Code & Ordinances

Tree and forest ordinances, just as with code for buildings or streets, are used to assure that certain practices are adopted uniformly across the community to achieve the common good. Tree ordinances most often address public trees, and set limits of removal and pruning. The greatest hazard to trees in many communities is forest removal for new development. Some communities extend protection to trees found on private property that are deemed significant due to age, size, historic, cultural, or ecological criteria.

## Arbor Day Celebration

An Arbor Day event is an educational or outreach event that can boost public awareness of the values of trees, celebrate annual achievements, and recognize public support. Other outreach activities can include workshops, starting a NeighborWoods program, and involving schools in planting projects.

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## The Washington State Report Card . . . .

The results of the studies show lots of room for improvement! Here are results and major concerns:

- 10% of communities have up-to-date tree inventories.
  - 12% of communities have management plans, indicating that few cities have clear goals and objectives for tree care that are shared by local government agencies and the public.
  - 20% of communities do routine tree care. Challenges were reported: poor pruning practices, hazard trees, pests and disease, and replacement of removed trees.
  - 47% of communities have tree ordinances. Many report a need for better enforcement.
  - 61% of communities celebrate Arbor Day, indicating strong citizen and volunteer commitment to trees.
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### Research:

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