

REGIONAL TREE CANOPY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Encourage COG member jurisdictions to conserve and expand urban forests. Share this publication with all COG communities and encourage local officials to determine the policies and recommendations that could be used to protect, manage and expand trees and forests in their community.
2. Establish an on-going forest policy committee to advise COG committees on issues and trends related to regional trees and forests; develop a regional tree action plan and regional tree canopy goals; and, promote, monitor, and realign policies and recommendations as new conditions and trends emerge.
3. Align regional urban forestry initiatives and metrics with the Region Forward Vision in support of broader land use planning goals and policies.

GOAL 1. PROTECT, MANAGE, AND EXPAND URBAN FORESTRY ASSETS FOR HEALTH AND QUALITY OF LIFE

Green urban areas encourage healthy social interaction, provide stress reduction and health benefits, help discourage criminal activity, and moderate temperature extremes. Sidewalks shaded by urban trees encourage pedestrian and biking activity and help to create friendly and inviting neighborhoods.

Recommendation: Use urban forests to help mitigate climate change, improve air and water quality, reduce stormwater pollution, and to encourage healthy social interaction in communities.

Strategy 1.1

Protect: (a) Develop policies and programs that encourage communities to protect their urban forest. (b) Work with public health officials to increase understanding of the positive preventive health effects of nature and urban tree canopy.

Strategy 1.2

Manage: (a) Build and strengthen urban forest management programs at local and regional scales. (b) Incorporate municipal tree removal management practices into local solid waste programs to slow the breakdown of carbon-based tissues into gaseous forms.

Strategy 1.3

Expand: Strategically plant new trees to expand the regional tree canopy to (a) further absorb and sequester atmospheric carbon; (b) reduce levels of fossil fuels used to cool and heat buildings; (c) lower ambient air temperatures during summer months; (d) absorb and slow stormwater runoff; and (e) remove gaseous and particulate pollutants from air and rainwater.

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GOAL 2. OPTIMIZE URBAN FOREST PROGRAMS

Local governments should periodically evaluate their urban forestry programs for effectiveness and to ensure that they are provided with adequate funding, staffing, and training to accomplish their mission. Regional collaboration could produce synergistic results that are not obtainable by local programs through idea and resource sharing, and regional economies of scale. An on-going regional dialogue could encourage a more consistent approach to urban forest management and help to optimize the effectiveness of local programs.

Recommendation: Establish a forest policy committee to support and guide regional collaboration and encourage among COG members to adopt effective and consistent programs, policies, and practices.

Strategy 2.1

Local urban forestry staff engage in regional urban forest planning policy discussions.

Strategy 2.2

Review and strengthen local tree-related policies and ordinances.

Strategy 2.3

Develop action plans and metrics to measure program progress.

Strategy 2.4

Evaluate current and future budget and staffing levels of local programs.

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GOAL 3. DEVELOP A REGIONAL URBAN FOREST ACTION PLAN AND CANOPY GOALS

Urban forest planning efforts are essential to the conservation and enhancement of tree canopy at the local and regional level. These efforts will help COG communities develop and implement goals, strategies, practices and actions that are needed to achieve local canopy goals and to sustain the health and functionality of tree and forest resources. A regional urban forest action plan will help the region to respond to growth pressures and to creatively implement the long-term vision and goals of local land use plans and Region Forward.

Recommendation: Develop quantitative and qualitative metrics to measure success of conservation efforts and canopy goals. Develop strategies to keep forested lands forested, intact and ecologically functional; and to increase the extent and vitality of urban tree canopy while minimizing potential risks and conflicts.

Strategy 3.1

Develop a Regional Urban Forest Action Plan that helps guide and integrate local forest management plans and initiatives.

Strategy 3.2

Conduct regional Urban Tree Canopy (UTC) assessments.

Strategy 3.3

Establish attainable canopy goals at regional and local scales using existing goals and efforts as examples.

URBAN FOREST ACTION PLAN COMPONENTS (As Identified in Goal 3 / Strategy 3.1)

- UFP 1:** Recommend a regional tree canopy goal and canopy levels for major categories of land use.
- UFP 2:** Establish metrics to gauge the health and sustainability of urban forests in the region.
- UFP 3:** Describe opportunities, threats and challenges that are likely to be encountered during the time span of the plan.
- UFP 4:** Describe the roles of local, state, and federal governmental entities.
- UFP 5:** Describe the roles of citizens and community-based organizations.

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- UFP 6:** Describe how government and community groups can interact and form synergistic partnerships.
- UFP 7:** Describe strategies to mitigate impacts of land use change, forest pests, invasive plants, and climate change on native forest ecosystems and urban trees.
- UFP 8:** Describe potential linkages to regional, state, and federal regulatory processes, and other natural resource conservation programs.
- UFP 9:** Describe practices to mitigate tree-related costs and risks such as tree risk and storm impact assessments and street tree life cycle planning.
- UFP 10:** Encourage local governments to conduct periodic reviews on the effectiveness of local efforts to conserve tree and forests during development.
- UFP 11:** Encourage local governments to evaluate the current capacity, scope and effectiveness of their public tree care and forest conservation programs.

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GOAL 4. INSPIRE THE COMMUNITY TO TAKE OWNERSHIP OF EFFORTS TO PROTECT AND EXPAND URBAN FORESTS

Urban forestry programs cannot succeed without the active support and engagement of the community. Community appreciation of tree benefits and engagement in urban forest planning, tree preservation, and tree planting efforts are necessary to ensure the long-term sustainability of the resource.

Recommendation: Encourage public participation in the development of shared visions, goals, and strategies and management plans at local and regional scales.

Strategy 4.1

Invite citizens, civic associations, and non-profit tree groups to participate in planning activities related to urban forestry and other forms of green infrastructure.

Strategy 4.2

Build synergistic partnerships with private and public entities that advocate for tree preservation and organize volunteer activities focused on tree planting and maintenance.

Strategy 4.3

Actively engage the community and acquire funding to develop a regional outreach and marketing program designed to identify and engage a broad demographic to encourage the formation of new partnerships.

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GOAL 5. INTEGRATE URBAN FORESTRY WITH REGION FORWARD

Region Forward is based on goals shared by officials and residents across the metropolitan Washington. It lays direction for the region and encourages leaders to think regionally when acting locally. Region Forward offers short and long-term targets and indicators to measure progress in creating a more prosperous, accessible, livable, and sustainable future. Urban forestry in the region should align with and complement Region Forward's vision.

Recommendation: Integrate urban forestry efforts to align Region Forward's short-term and long-term milestones for the region

Strategy 5.1

Increase interaction with members of the Region Forward Coalition.

Strategy 5.2

Use the Region Forward Coalition to strengthen support for the Tree Canopy Management Strategy and strengthen mutual goals.