

CONSERVING TREES AND FORESTS IN METROPOLITAN WASHINGTON

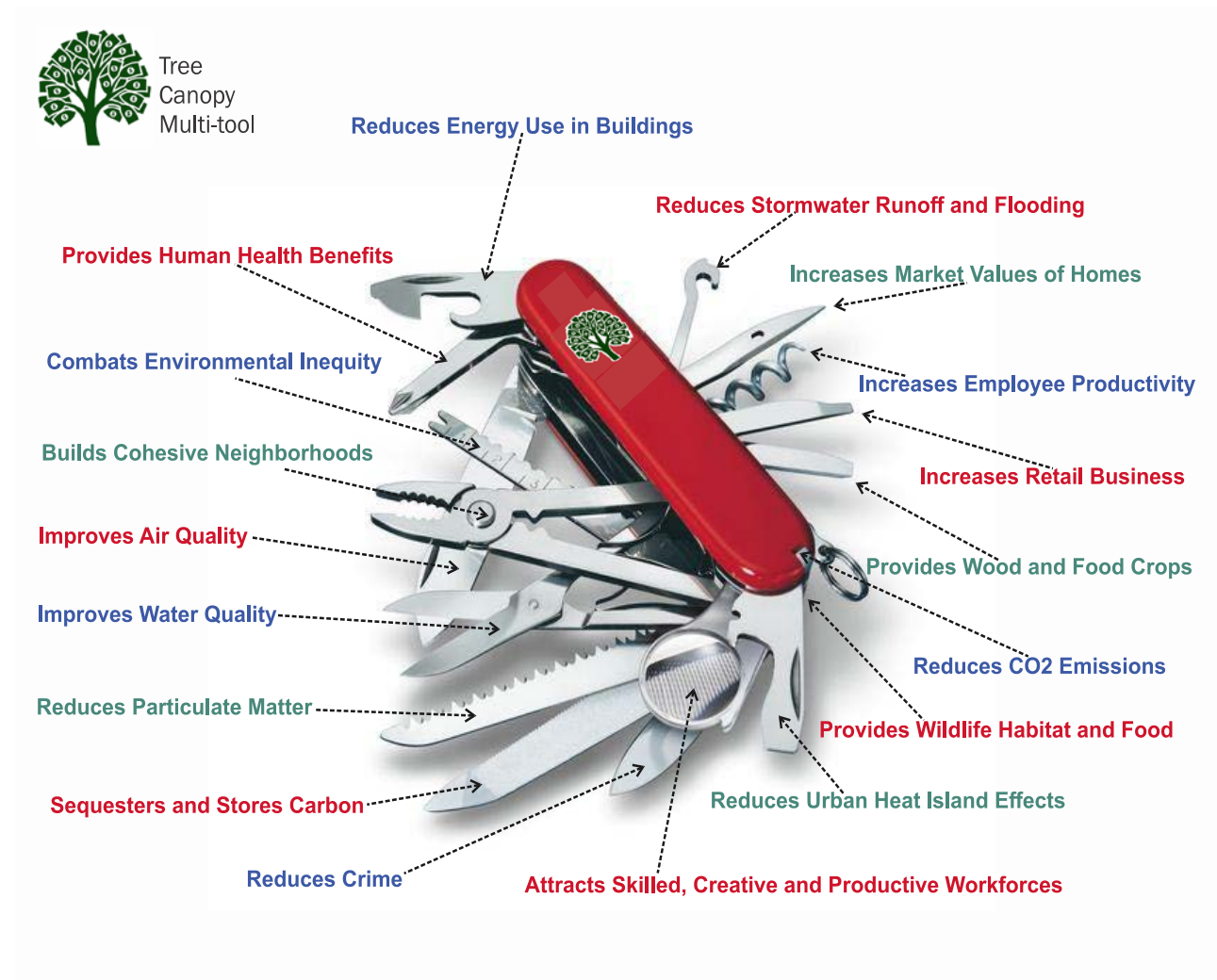
Regional Tree Canopy Goal

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COG Board of Directors
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Why Conserving Trees and Forests is Important

Over four decades of research demonstrates that trees and forests contribute significant levels of environmental and ecological services and should be regarded as an indispensable component of public infrastructure. More recent research has revealed the positive relationships between urban forests, public health, equitable communities, and vibrant economies.



COG Board of Directors Resolution R7-2019 (RTCS)

COG Board of Directors Resolution R7-2019 February 13, 2019

“The board endorses the establishment of a Regional Tree Canopy Subcommittee of CEEPC...which would be charged with protecting, managing, and expanding urban forestry assets for health and quality of life; optimizing urban forest programs; **developing a regional urban forest action plan and canopy goals**; inspiring the community to take ownership of efforts to protect and expand urban forests; and integrating urban forestry with Region Forward and meeting Chesapeake Bay water quality goals.”

An Opportunity to Display Local and National Leadership

COG can provide leadership at the national level by adopting the regional tree canopy goals.

COG's record of leadership for regional initiatives and goals should be extended to trees and forests.



(Dafacct/[pixabay](#))



(James Wheeler/[pixabay](#))

Briefing Outline

- Background on Tree Conservation Initiatives
- Considerations behind the Tree Canopy Goals
- Recommended Tree Canopy Goals and monitoring process
- Regional Legislation supporting this Resolution
- Resources for Communities
- 2024 Proposed Resolution

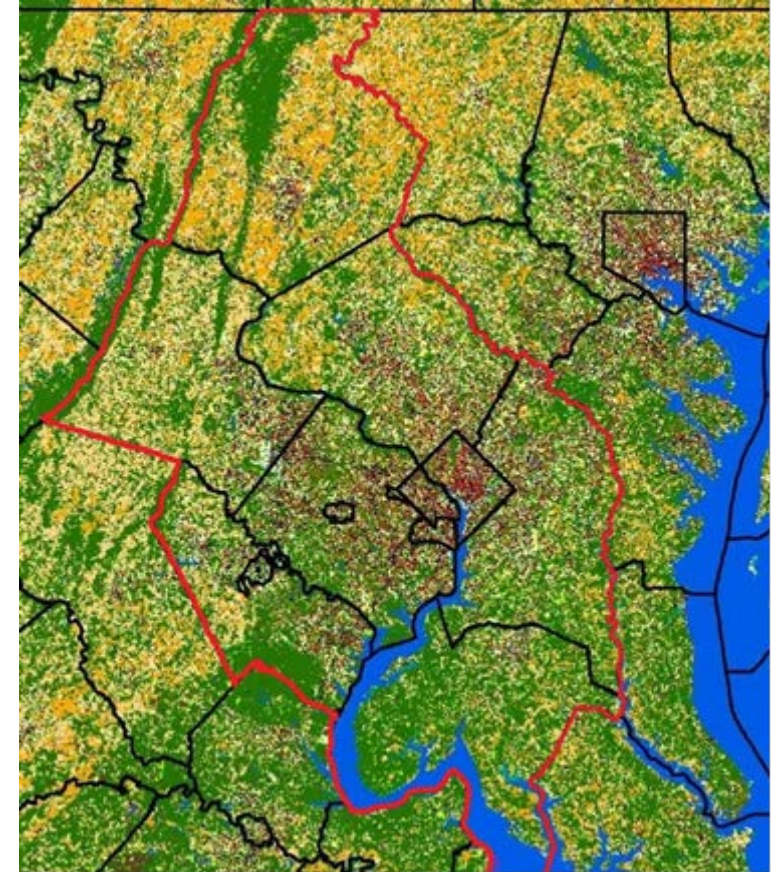
Background

History of Regional Tree Conservation Initiatives

- 1989/1990 – Virginia and Maryland enact tree conservation legislation
 - 2006-2008 – Tree measures added to 8-hr Ozone Air Quality SIP
 - 2010 – Tree canopy strategies identified COG Climate Report
 - 2010 – 2024 - Climate, Energy and Environment Policy Committee (CEEPC) Priority
 - 2018 – COG Tree Canopy Management Strategy recommends setting a regional and local tree canopy goals
 - 2019 – COG Board Establishes Regional Tree Canopy Subcommittee under CEEPC
 - ✓ Examples of successful tree programs published in the *Tree Conservation Cookbook*
 - ✓ Regional and smaller scale canopy goals
- Regional Tree Action Plan (Upcoming)

Considerations

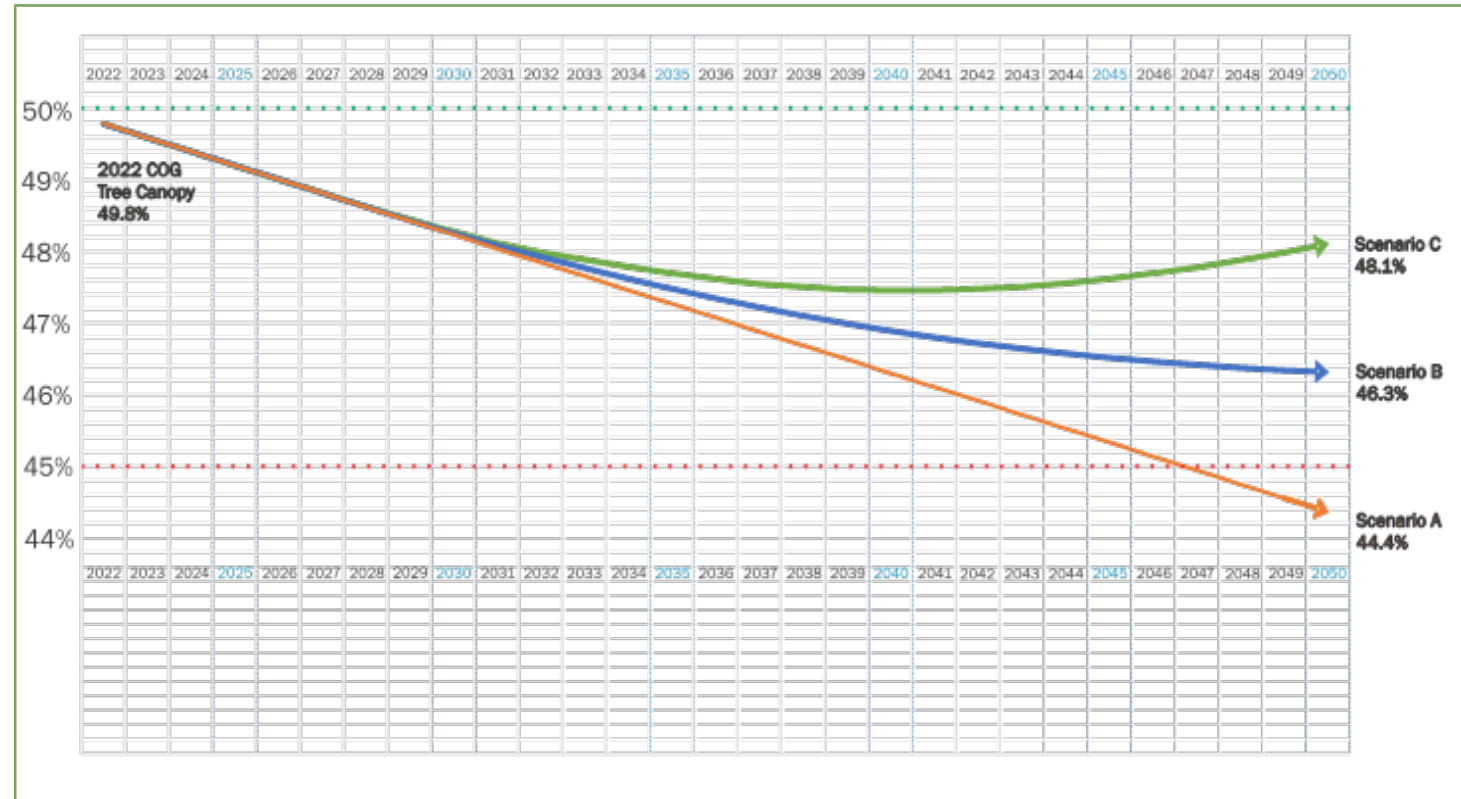
- Long history of state and local leadership on Tree Conservation and Tree Planting (1989 to Present)
- Chesapeake Bay Program Land Use/Land Cover data provides accurate Tree Canopy coverage regionwide - updated every five years
- COG tree canopy currently estimated at 49.6%. CBP data shows loss of 4,300 acres/year
- Establishing a Regional Tree Canopy Goal will inspire and spur action at the local level
- Tools & resources are being developed to help local governments meet canopy goals



Web image: Chesapeake Conservancy

Tree Canopy Goal Recommendations

An analysis of CBP 2022 LULC data, tree canopy gain and loss trends, comprehensive land use and transportation plans, local zoning maps, regional population projections, green infrastructure plans, and tree conservation programs suggests that it is feasible to support a tree canopy coverage of 50% over the next 25-years through increased levels of tree preservation and planting efforts.



Tree Canopy Goal Recommendations (continued)

The RTCS recommends three tiers of goals:

- 1. An overarching regional goal of 50%.** Represents the minimum percentage of tree canopy that COG communities strive to achieve and maintain on a regional basis from present until 2050.
- 2. Intermediate Target Goals based on Population Density and Urbanization** - provided to help communities identify canopy goals for watersheds, planning districts, census tracts, and towns and smaller cities.
- 3. Smaller Scale Target Goals for General Land Use Categories** - identify mature canopy coverage levels recommended for 18 general classes of land use categories.

The intermediate and smaller scale target goals reflect a “*take care of the pennies and the dollars will take care of themselves*” approach to achieving and sustaining the regional goal.

Intended Use of the Canopy Goal Recommendations

The recommended percentages of tree canopy coverage should be regarded as *best management practices* and *aspirational*.

They are not intended to be applied in a prescriptive fashion or to be interpreted as universally applicable to every scenario.

Just as individual jurisdictions must identify conservation objectives based on the unique set of conditions present within their geographic boundaries; determining what the optimal level of tree canopy is for any property or geographic area must be addressed on a site-by-site basis.

Regional Legislation Supporting This Resolution

VIRGINIA

- H 529 Replacement of trees during development process in certain localities. Expands provisions of § 15.2-961 to all Virginia localities.
- H 1100 (Trees; conservation and replacement during development process). Expands provisions of § 15.2-961.1 to all Virginia localities.

MARYLAND

In 2021 adopted the *Tree Solutions NOW Act* to plant five million additional trees in the Maryland landscape.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

The *Tree Preservation Enhancement Amendment Act* and *Creation of an Office of Natural Area Conservation Establishment Act*.

Resources for COG Communities

- 2018 Regional Tree Canopy Management Strategy
- Tree Conservation Cookbook
- Report: Conserving Trees and Forests in Metropolitan Washington
 - Intermediate Target Goals based on Population and Urbanization
 - Smaller Scale Target Goals Recommended for Land Use Categories
 - Metrics for evaluating success of tree conservation efforts
 - Guidance to help local governments identify realistic canopy goals
 - Tree canopy Fact Sheets Links for COG Jurisdictions
 - Examples of current canopy goals and tree conservation programs in the region
- Regional Tree Action Plan (Spring 2025)

Recommended Process Going Forward

Attempting to forecast how regional canopy levels will be impacted by climate change and shifting societal values; economic patterns; housing and transportation needs, etc., contains many uncertainties.

The regional goal and supporting target goals should be viewed as fluid and reevaluated once every five years to allow reaction to changing conditions and unforeseeable events.

The next opportunities to project canopy gain/loss trends with higher confidence will occur in 2025 and 2030 when the Chesapeake Bay Program is scheduled to release updated LULC data.

The percentages associated with the goals may ultimately prove less valuable than creating an expectation that COG will periodically reexamine and report on the status of the region's tree and forests.

Resolution R14-2024

- The Board establishes a regional goal of maintaining a minimum tree canopy coverage of 50 percent across the Metropolitan Washington region, as recommended by the Regional Tree Canopy Subcommittee (RTCS); and
- The Board accepts the *Conserving Trees and Forests in Metropolitan Washington* as a resource document and urges member jurisdictions to develop and implement strategies, policies, and programs to achieve the regional tree canopy goal, including updates to relevant policies, procedures, ordinances and the development of tree planting and preservation initiatives and goals; and
- The Board requests that CEEPC and the Regional Tree Canopy Subcommittee reassess the regional goal and supporting target goals every five years until at least 2050 to evaluate regional efforts to protect, manage, and expand the region's tree and forest assets and to monitor progress towards achieving the established overall tree canopy goal and related target goals in the Metropolitan Washington region.



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