

Urban and Community Forestry Program

USDA Forest Service

Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry

Program Overview 2011



Background: Urban and community forests occur in nearly all communities within the Northeast and Midwest, from the most urban to the very rural. In the State Assessments and Strategies, State forestry agencies placed emphasis on the benefits of trees and forests as green infrastructure, contributing to the quality of life in communities. In an integrated approach, most States seek to protect existing tree cover, implement best management practices, and engage local officials and the public in planning, sustaining, and improving forest resources in and around cities, suburbs, and towns.

Program as delivered in the Northeast and Midwest: The *UCF Program* provides educational, technical and financial assistance to conserve and protect forests, and sustain and expand the benefits provided by urban tree canopy (UTC) in metropolitan areas and communities. In collaboration with state forestry agencies and other partners, the NA helps develop sustainable local programs in communities to assess and monitor urban forest health, establish and care for trees, plan and restore green infrastructure, and educate and engage the public in stewardship activities. In collaboration with scientists of the Northern Research Station the NA develops and delivers information and tools for assessing and managing UTC and fosters awareness of the social, environmental, and economic benefits that trees and forests provide. Benefits include green jobs, improved air and water quality, energy conservation, public health, safety, education, and resilience to the impacts of climate change, including invasive pests and catastrophic fire and weather events.

A broad urban strategy guides the work of NA staffs as they develop plans and collaborate with partners to achieve results at the regional scale. The focus of the strategy is *to sustain and expand urban tree canopy in metropolitan areas and communities*. Priority areas of collaborative work through FY 2015 include:

1. Expanding urban forestry programs in the region served by the Northeastern Area.
2. Helping communities set urban tree canopy goals and monitoring progress towards meeting these goals.
3. Promoting the effective integration of green space with existing urban infrastructure.
4. Protecting and enhancing water quality through broad landscape-scale initiatives that include urban areas.
5. Enhancing the capacity of urban and community residents to build and maintain the urban forest.
6. Improving urban forest health through the early detection of and rapid response to threats that include invasive species, weather events, fire, and climate change.

The UCF Program is delivered through an Area office and three field offices with expertise in urban forestry, landscape architecture, environmental education, forest health, technology transfer, and information management. Broad Program policy and direction is set collaboratively and monitored in the Area office, with the field responsible for implementation, including communications and technical assistance. After the Area office has certified the availability of funds and notified award recipients, nearly all grants and agreements are approved and monitored in the field.

From available UCF Program funding, 85% is distributed as formula financial assistance to the 20 States and District of Columbia. This “core” funding helps to build State capacity and is allocated based on the percent of regional population living in “performing” communities served by each state. The remaining 15% of available funds are allocated through Area-wide competition to achieve results at the landscape scale. These project dollars are targeted to assist State and local agencies and organizations to conserve, protect, and enhance tree and forest cover. Landscape scale projects have included urban tree cover assessment, green infrastructure improvement, urban forest health monitoring, and tree restoration efforts.

NA UCF Staffing Summary:

<u>NA Unit</u>	<u># of Positions - Function</u>
Headquarters	1 – Staff Specialist/Program Leader
Field	3 – Field Representatives (partial)
	3 – Staff Specialists
	1 – Landscape Architect
	1 – Natural Resource Specialist/Chicago (partial)

Funding History (UCF budget, National and Northeastern Area in \$000):

	FY 06	FY 07	FY 08	FY 09	FY 10	FY 11
Northeastern Area*	8,034	8,561	7,822	7,315	7,031	
National	28,451	30,130	27,691	29,541	30,377	
Percent of National	28.2%	28.4%	28.2%	24.7%	28.0%	%

**Not including earmarks and supplemental competitive allocation grants*

Outputs Reported by States in the Community Accomplishment Reporting System (CARS):

Performing Communities*	FY 06	FY 07	FY 08	FY 09	FY 10
Northeastern Area	3,519	3,525	3,720	3,766	3,969
National	6,564	6,326	7,139	6,853	7,102
Percent of National	53.6%	55.7%	52.1%	54.9%	55.9%

**Performing Communities is a measure representing the total number of communities that state forestry agencies report as having received technical, financial, or educational assistance, and are successfully developing or managing their urban forestry programs, including staff capacity, local ordinances/policies, advocacy groups, and planning.*

Program Outcomes: In FY 2010, the UCF Program in the Northeastern Area dispersed \$5.7 million and leveraged another \$8 million in state and local funds, including more than 480 small grants to communities. State partners provided assistance to 3,969 communities impacting 76.8 million people (more than 60% of the region's total population and 43% of total national program performance).

High Priority Issues and Opportunities:

- 80% of the Northeastern Area population (43% of the nation's total) lives in 104 metropolitan areas. For many, the urban forest is the only forest they see or know. The opportunity exists to work with state and private organizations to promote the benefits of forests in those communities with less than average urban tree canopy (UTC) and greater than average population density and impervious surface area.
- According to the 2010 Resource Planning Act (RPA) assessments, the average tree canopy cover in urban and community areas is above 30 percent across the Northeast and Midwest (New England, Mid-Atlantic, and Midwest communities averaged 44%, 29%, and 18% respectively). The opportunity exists to increase the understanding by decision makers about the amount and value of UTC that currently exists and the amount that could exist.
- 600 communities in the Northeast and Midwest have signed the Mayor's Climate Protection Agreement to meet or beat the Kyoto Protocol targets. Using local inventory data and the **i-Tree** software suite, the opportunity exists to emphasize the important contribution forests and trees make to climate and carbon, including energy conservation.
- There is growing recognition by EPA, DOT, HUD, and state and local agencies that establishing and maintaining green infrastructure and nature in communities and metropolitan areas will help to mitigate and manage stormwater at lower cost, while meeting other environmental, social, and public health goals. The opportunity exists to encourage collaboration with a broad array of partners on green infrastructure issues to advance UTC goals.
- Invasive pests and diseases are posing an increasing threat to the region's forests, and it is widely recognized that a more consistent and comprehensive effort is needed to improve early pest detection and restore tree canopy in urban areas, where pest populations are often first established. The opportunity exists to promote urban forest health practices to monitor, sustain, and restore ecological function within broader watershed landscapes.
- Potential threats to UTC include climate change, invasive species, weather events, wildland fire in the urban interface, and development activities. The opportunity exists to provide tools and resources to respond to UTC damage minimizing the loss of urban tree canopy due to invasive pests and other disturbances.

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