

USDA Forest Service

URBAN AND COMMUNITY FORESTRY
PROGRAM DIRECTION

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Updated by Katie Friday and Sandy Macias 6/3/2011
(to reflect SWARS/FAP and CARS)

INTRODUCTION

Urban area expansion and inner-city decline is a national problem that continues to impact basic ecological functions essential to a healthy and productive society. Healthy trees and forests in urban areas contribute to improved air and water quality, watershed function, energy conservation and social well-being. The quality of life in cities and towns will be enhanced by effective State programs that foster cooperative efforts to plan for, plant, protect and maintain community trees, forests and related natural resources. Partnerships created through such programs will lead to an engaged citizenry committed to building healthy and viable communities for themselves and future generations. An effective urban and community forestry assistance program provides a foundation for meeting these goals.

This document establishes direction for the implementation of the USDA Forest Service Urban and Community Forestry (UCF) Program. Urban and community forestry is broadly defined as the comprehensive management of trees, forests, and related natural resources in populated areas. These areas include the inner city, suburbs, the developing fringe of cities and towns, and communities of various sizes. Urban and community forestry is an integration of natural, social, and economic systems as they affect and are affected by human activity.

The Forest Service provides national UCF Program leadership and coordination. Program delivery primarily occurs at the state level, through State Foresters and key partners. These partnerships contribute to a state-wide linkage of diverse groups and programs. State UCF Councils advise the State Forester on program direction and priorities. Other external partners, particularly community-based organizations and local governments, play an important role in expanding the public/private partnerships that promote understanding and management of urban and community forests and related natural resources.

PURPOSE

Section 9, Urban and Community Forestry Assistance, of the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act of 1978 (PL 95-313), as amended by PL 101-624, encourages "...States to provide information and technical assistance to units of local government and others that will encourage cooperative efforts to plan urban forestry programs and to plant, protect, maintain, and utilize wood from, trees in open spaces, greenbelts, roadside screens, parks, woodlands, curb areas, and residential developments in urban areas." The specific purposes of Urban and Community Forestry Assistance as stated in Section 9 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 that meet the requirements of Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, 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 and to reduce carbon dioxide emissions, conserve energy, and improve air quality in addition to providing other environmental benefits;
6. promote the establishment of demonstration projects in selected urban and community settings 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 involving the cultivation of trees, shrubs and complementary ground covers, of individuals involved in the planning, development, and maintenance of urban and community forests and trees; and
8. expand existing research and educational efforts intended to improve the understanding of tree growth and maintenance, tree physiology and morphology, species adaptations, and forest ecology; the value of integrating trees and ground covers; the economic, environmental, social and psychological benefits of

trees and forest cover in urban and community environments; and the role of trees in conserving energy and mitigating urban heat islands.

PROGRAM AUTHORITIES

The national UCF Program is authorized by Section 9, Urban and Community Forestry Assistance, of the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act of 1978 (PL 95-313) as amended by PL 101-624. This law authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture to provide financial, technical, and related assistance to State Foresters or equivalent State officials. The law also states, "In providing such assistance the Secretary is authorized to cooperate with interested members of the public including nonprofit private organizations. The Secretary is also authorized to cooperate directly with units of local government and others in implementing this section whenever the Secretary and the affected State Forester or equivalent State official agree that direct cooperation would better achieve the purposes of this section."

The technical, financial, and related assistance, including conservation education, must focus on trees, forests, openspaces, greenbelts, and related natural resources, to include soil, water, air, and wildlife. Activities and projects that are authorized include the planning for and management of trees, forests, openspaces, greenbelts and related natural resources in communities, including urban and urbanizing areas.

PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

State Forestry agencies (including the District of Columbia and the U.S. affiliated islands) provide statewide leadership, direction, networks, program management, and financial and technical assistance. Delivery of the UCF Program relies primarily on the cooperation of State Forestry agencies, local governments and tribal communities, the private sector, nonprofit and community-based organizations, and Forest Service offices. Nonprofit and community-based partnerships are integral to the success of the UCF Program. These partnerships strengthen and promote urban and community forestry policies, programs, and projects within cities and communities.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

USDA Forest Service

Washington Office:

The Forest Service will provide national leadership and coordination among agencies and other national groups. In consultation with the National Urban and Community Forestry Advisory Council (NUCFAC), the National Association of State Foresters (NASF), other agencies, and partners, the Forest Service will establish policy, strategies, direction, procedures, priorities, management oversight, and address emerging issues at the national level. By communicating Program results, the Forest Service will garner support and understanding of the public, partners, and Congress.

Regional/Area/International Institute of Tropical Forestry Offices (IITF):

The FS Regional/Area/IITF Offices coordinate implementation of the UCF Program. They foster partnerships with State Foresters, Tribal governments, multi-state organizations and other federal agencies. In addition, they develop promotional, educational, technology transfer and training materials/programs needed to support urban and community forestry.

They are also responsible for monitoring, evaluating and communicating Program results and emerging issues to ensure effective program delivery. They provide regional program direction, technology transfer, and technical and financial assistance. They ensure that State programs are available to all segments of the population without restrictions or limitations based on cultural or ethnic diversity or economic status (Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964).

Research:

With its national system of research units, the Forest Service will maintain specific units to address urban and community forestry issues. These units will work closely with Forest Service UCF program staff, State agencies, universities, and external partners to identify important research questions, conduct studies, and transfer findings. Forest Service Research will seek knowledge and information that managers can use to control costs while maximizing the physical, biological, economic and social benefits of our nation's urban and community forests.

State Foresters

State forestry agencies, or equivalent State organizations, including Washington, D.C., and the U.S. affiliated islands, have responsibility for providing statewide leadership and delivery of urban and community forestry support to local communities and other interested groups.

State Foresters work with other State and Federal agencies to facilitate new and existing partnerships, develop and disseminate technical guidance and information, provide financial support for the establishment and growth of local urban and community forestry programs, develop the State's urban and community forestry programs, and report on program accomplishment using the current Forest Service reporting system.

State forestry organizations also contribute to the creation and maintenance of critical statewide networks, such as State urban and community forestry councils. State councils link diverse groups with management programs and delivery systems and make available the skills and technical services that encompass the national urban and community forestry objectives.

State Foresters will work with the Forest Service Regional/Area/IITF offices to assure program opportunities are accessible to all communities. They will work with local community leaders and nonprofit and community-based organizations to strengthen and support volunteer urban and community forestry activities, as described herein.

Cities, Towns, Counties, Tribal Governments and Communities, and Agencies

Local and tribal governments and communities are encouraged to establish urban and community forestry programs suited to their unique situation including the development of ordinances and incentives that address local community forestry issues and opportunities. Local citizen groups and other key partners provide broad-based support for these programs. All segments of the community should have equitable access to program activities. Additionally, various State and Federal agencies are encouraged to participate and contribute to local as well as state-wide urban and community forestry programs and projects.

Nonprofit and Community-Based Organizations, and Other Key Partners

These organizations are essential in encouraging and supporting the development and implementation of urban and community forestry programs. They assist in developing and implementing state strategies by serving on local, regional and/or State advisory councils, committees or boards. They assist in engaging people to plan and implement urban and community forestry activities at the local level.

The private/commercial sector, including tree care companies, natural resource professionals, nurseries, landscape contractors, developers, home builders and their respective Associations are vital to the successful establishment and maintenance of community trees, forests and related natural resources. They also play a major role in providing expertise, financial and in-kind support for projects, and serve on local and State advisory councils, committees or boards.

STANDARDS FOR PROGRAM PARTICIPATION

The USDA Forest Service, acting for the Secretary of Agriculture, has determined the following elements are required of States (including Washington D.C. and the U.S. affiliated islands) to fully qualify for support from the UCF Program:

1. Urban and community forestry program coordinator
2. Volunteer/partnership coordination
3. An urban and community forestry council
4. Dedicated Urban Forestry program focus incorporated in Statewide Assessment and Resource Strategy ("Forest Action Plan").

Partnerships are an important element in the success of the Program. While the State Forester's office is the primary delivery organization, program elements may be implemented in a variety of ways including the use of grants, contracts and/or agreements.

Urban and Community Forestry Program Coordinator

Each State shall establish and maintain a full-time UCF Program Coordinator position. This individual, in cooperation with other State staff, works with urban and community forestry partners to plan and deliver the State UCF program. The coordinator is the State Forester's UCF program manager and is the primary contact for the Forest Service regional counterpart.

Volunteer/Partnership Coordination

Each State shall have a skilled full-time Volunteer/Partnership Coordinator or the equivalent of a full-time (FTE) Volunteer/Partnership Coordinator, in addition to the State's UCF Program Coordinator. Each state is unique and should determine the most effective way to deliver assistance to local volunteer-based organizations. The individual(s) (state staff or partners) will work cooperatively with the State UCF Program Coordinator. The individual(s) will work with key partners and should assure that outreach is available to the broadest possible cross-section of the State's population, including culturally diverse groups. The Volunteer/Partnership Coordinator(s) responsibilities are to partner and coordinate with grassroots community-based organizations, track the value of volunteer contributions, develop and conduct training workshops, establish and maintain volunteer/partnership databases, and help to publicize and communicate volunteer/partnership activities.

Urban and Community Forestry Council

Each State shall seek ongoing advice on delivery of their UCF program from an appropriately broad based board(s) or council(s) that consists of governmental agencies, industry, nonprofit and community-based organizations, and grassroots volunteers concerned with urban and community forestry. The Council's responsibilities are to advise the State Forester in the development of Program emphasis, priorities and implementation, and periodic review and revision of the State's UCF focus in the Statewide Assessment and Resource Strategy ("Forest Action Plan").

Dedicated Urban & Community Forestry program focus incorporated in State-wide Assessment and Resource Strategy ("Forest Action Plan").

The State's "Forest Action Plan" should reflect priorities for the State's UCF Program. There are a variety of ways to address this program element:

- a. incorporate assessments of urban and community forest resources in the "Forest Action Plan;"
- b. develop strategies to address urban and community forestry resources as a separate issue and chapter of the "Forest Action Plan"; and/or
- c. present and integrate urban and community forestry strategies into multiple cross-cutting issues in the "Forest Action Plan."

The "Forest Action Plan" should address State-wide strategies necessary to deliver the UCF Program and meet both State and Federal Program goals and objectives.

Public participation should be invited and considered in the development, review, and or revision of the "Forest Action Plan."

Plan revision should occur as necessary, but at least at five (5) year intervals or when required by Congress.

The "Forest Action Plan" will have the concurrence of the State Forester and the Chief of the Forest Service.

STATE GRANT PROGRAM GUIDELINES

States are encouraged to offer competitive grants that involve partnerships with local governments, non-profit organizations, and the private sector for the purpose of establishing effective community forestry programs. Where State programs provide funding of grants, the following must be met:

1. States will establish matching criteria and comply with UCF Program direction, appropriate Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Circulars, and applicable Federal and State regulations.

Whether State programs provide funding of grants or in-kind provision of resources to partnership projects, the following must be met:

2. While tree planting is an allowable use of funds, States/Regions shall, through mutual agreement, establish limits on the percentage of funds available for tree planting.
3. Tree planting projects must include a work plan and a maintenance plan approved by the State Forester or his/her designee. Other urban and community forestry projects must have a work plan and a defined product or measurable outcome.
4. Plant materials used in tree planting must, at a minimum, meet the American Standard for Nursery Stock, and tree protection and maintenance must meet American National Standards Institute (ANSI) standards (State standards may be substituted with Forest Service regional office concurrence), or equivalent quality standards where the above standards have not been adapted for tropical areas.

MONITORING AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Forest Service Regional/Area/IITF offices in cooperation with the States will review, at least every five years, and evaluate State UCF Program effectiveness and compliance with Program direction herein.

States will conduct self reviews annually using the current Forest Service's current performance accountability system (Community Accomplishments Reporting System for Urban & Community Forestry Program [CARS], accessed through the National Information Center [NIC]). An annual program accomplishment report shall be submitted in the form of program highlights in the State Fact Sheet system (SFS, also accessed through NIC).

States and other grant recipients shall document and report expenditures and accomplishments of UCF Program funds, following standard grant management procedures.

FUNDING

Funding for the UCF Program is an annual process dependant upon appropriation of funds by Congress.

In consultation with the National Association of State Foresters, the Forest Service will determine a national allocation process. Each Region/Area/IITF office will develop a regional process in consultation with their State Foresters.

National investments and projects will be developed in consultation with the National Association of State Foresters and Forest Service Regional/Area/IITF offices and comply with Program authorities and direction.

The Federal share of program support to any direct recipient shall not exceed 50-percent, except for the governments of American Samoa, the CNMI and Guam, which may have match waived.

All partners providing contributions to UCF activities will be acknowledged.

With mutual agreement of the State Forester and Regional office(s), urban and community forestry funds may be provided to National Forest units for delivery of UCF Program assistance. Funds must be used for activities identified in a State's Strategic Plan and must be consistent with UCF Program direction. Funds will come from the affected State(s) allocation.

Funding for State and local programs from the national UCF Program is not intended to substitute for State and local urban and community forestry funds.