

# Urban and Community Forestry Program 2017 Accomplishment Report – Vermont

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## Introduction

“Vermont's forests and trees are integral to the health and well-being of our communities and are valued as critical community infrastructure. Citizens, government, and businesses collaborate in planning for, investing in, and maintaining these resources and the ecosystem services they provide, for this and future generations.”

— Vision Statement: Vermont Urban & Community Forestry Program

The Vermont Urban & Community Forestry Program (VT UCF) recognizes that urban forests are an essential feature of the urban ecosystem that provide valuable services. To maintain this system and services, responsibility lies with us all. The role of the VT UCF program in achieving this long-term mission is “to lead citizens, businesses, and governments in understanding the value of urban and community forests and promote civic responsibility for and participation in the stewardship of these resources for this and future generations.” Strategies in place focus heavily on providing technical assistance, education, and outreach. The program’s staff consists of a Program Coordinator, three Educational Outreach Coordinators, and two Community Involvement Coordinators. The Vermont Urban and Community Forestry Council, which is composed of 20 members representing professional associations, educational institutions, nonprofit groups, regional officials, tree boards, and State agencies, works in partnership with VT UCF to identify needs and determine program direction.

## Key Accomplishments

### Cooling Vermont’s Most Vulnerable Communities

“One impact of climate change in Vermont is increasingly hotter summers,” said Jared Ulmer, Climate & Health Program Manager with the Health Department. “Planting more trees will help keep our urban areas cooler while using less energy. It will also provide many other healthy community benefits for cleaner air, water, and improved wildlife habitats.”

In 2017, VT UCF partnered with the Vermont Climate & Health Program to strategically plant trees to promote improved public health. Using research from the Health Department, this program targeted communities with high densities of exposed asphalt and rooftops but limited tree cover. Residents of these communities are most vulnerable to heat-related illnesses when and where buildings cannot be cooled.

The UCF team took the guesswork out of where to best plant trees in these communities by using the Arbor Day Foundation’s Energy-Saving Trees research-based, easy-to-use, online mapping tool. By entering simple information about a home and yard, the tool calculates where to strategically plant trees for the greatest cooling, energy, and money-saving benefits. “When planted properly, a single mature tree can

save a homeowner up to 20 percent on energy costs. Trees provide shade when it's hot and a wind barrier when it's cold," said Danielle Fitzko, Urban & Community Forestry Program Manager. "For homes without air conditioning, shade trees can make the home feel cooler during summer heat."

VT UCF provided 200 trees to residents in the urbanized areas of Bennington and Newport, both of which exhibit relatively high risk for heat illness. During the first 20 years, the trees are expected to save participating residents more than \$275 in energy costs. The trees will also reduce atmospheric carbon by more than 200,000 pounds, remove nearly 600 pounds of air pollutants, and intercept more than 1.5 million gallons of stormwater. The total estimated economic benefit for these household and ecosystem services is roughly \$50,000.

Jared Ulmer states, "Vermont Department of Health is excited to be working with the Urban & Community Forestry Program and Arbor Day Foundation. We are focused on providing private property trees for shade and reduction of city temps. This partnership is a great example of collaboration to meet an organization's environmental objectives, encourage community engagement, and improve community resilience."



*On a sunny Saturday in June, residents in the urbanized area of Newport City and Bennington picked up trees to plant around their homes to keep them cool and save money. All 100% of the follow-up survey respondents reported that they would recommend this program to a friend!*

### **Small Forests Are a Big Deal!**

Vermont's forest landownership is changing. Trends in housing density suggest that the amount of land in parcels larger than 50 acres is declining, while the number of parcels between 2 and 10 acres is increasing. VT UCF worked with partners to address this shift by developing the [Backyard Woods Online Course](#). The course helps landowners with less than 25 acres learn more about the forest on their property — what's in it, what wildlife uses it, and how to become better caretakers of it.

Backyard Woods includes online lessons, a hands-on session, and a learning journal with activities for participants to complete each week. At the end of the course, participants walk away with a Backyard Woods Action Plan tailored to their specific property.

In 2016, VT UCF ran the course for residents of several counties to pilot the program and in 2017, went statewide with nearly 100 participants. According to one participant, "I look at my woods with newfound understanding of how to be a steward. The program provided so much information, direction, and resources, which has already and will continue to help me in our woods!"

Program participants have identified a range of activities as part of their Backyard Woods Action Plan, including cultivating edible mushrooms, removing invasive species, planting pollinator gardens, and making maple syrup. The course has been successful in helping landowners learn that they do not need to "clean up" their forest. One participant discovered that the forested wetland on their property holds great value, saying:

"Our future plan was to try to drain the area of fallen trees and create a pasture or orchard, but after participating in the course, we are now rethinking what we should do. We'd also like to build trails for biking and snowshoeing while at the same time increase areas for wildlife habitats."

Small forests and the landowners that care for them are a big deal.



*Logging on to learn makes the information accessible, but it's just not the same as getting out in the woods. Backyard Woods participants log off and get in the woods for a field trip with foresters to transfer the online learning into the real world.*

### **Statistical Highlights**

Managing Communities:	23
Developing Communities:	48
Population of Participating Communities:	397,214
Volunteer Assistance Generated (hours):	17,150

