Disaster Recovery— Making Urban Forests Safer After Storms

The Challenge

Many communities do not have adequate expertise or staffing to thoroughly assess tree damage after weather-related disasters. As a result, they sometimes remove valuable trees that should be saved, and they keep trees that pose hazards to public safety that should be removed. These communities also miss out on potential FEMA funding that could be used to reimburse them for costly storm-related tree work.

The Solution

The U.S. Forest Service Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry (NA S&PF) supports an initiative that can help communities better assess storm damage to their urban forests. NA S&PF recruits, trains, and deploys strike teams of professional arborists and urban foresters to help communities assess storm-related tree damage and make management recommendations. NA S&PF staff members work through a Cooperative Agreement with the Massachusetts Tree Wardens and Foresters Association and other partners to conduct two workshops each year and to train participants. They also provide more advanced instruction for team leaders, who later become trainers in the program and operational leaders during post-storm deployments.

The U.S. Forest Service and States served by the U.S. Forest Service's Southern Region initiated the project in 2007. NA S&PF has been actively involved in the program since 2009, forming an advisory committee, purchasing equipment, and starting training. Since then, the partners have completed eight training sessions with roughly 150 participants across 20 States and the District of Columbia.

Resulting Benefits

The program helps make urban forests safer. "When there is no expertise, they leave trees that are damaged and unsafe and remove injured trees that are still viable," said John Parry, an NA S&PF urban forester. "So the initiative helps to protect the urban canopy."

> *"We're saving trees that can recover and also removing hazards to public safety."*

A satellite image of Oak Park in Manchester, NH, indicates trees slated for trimming (yellow dots) and trees for removal (red dots). Photo credit: Service Layer Credits: Copyright 2013 Esri, DeLorme, NAVTEQ, TomTom. Used by permission. Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, i-cubed, USDA, USGS, AEX, Getmapping, Aerogrid, IGN, IGP, swisstopo, and the GIS User Community.

"We're saving trees that can recover and also removing hazards to public safety. It's also a way for communities to claim FEMA money they're eligible for by documenting the damage, and it can also help to identify tree planting spaces for reforestation in the process," he added.

Sharing Success

The communities that benefit from this initiative can be seen as success stories in many ways. In Manchester, NH, for instance, 700 trees were identified for removal or pruning needs. The City of Manchester was able to get FEMA reimbursement funding for the tree work. The Manchester city forester also made use of NA S&PF-generated maps to get bids from contractors for the tree work.

In Springfield, MA, the focus was on identifying replanting spaces, and about 2,000 sites were identified. The city later started a successful fundraising program called "Re-Green Springfield" to begin replanting trees lost to the 2011 tornado there.

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