



# ISSUE BRIEFING

## SUBJECT:

### Support Urban & Community Forestry

**BACKGROUND:** Urban forests are part of vital green corridors in cities and suburbs that support healthy, livable communities of all sizes. They are a key component of sustainable green infrastructure and provide quantifiable ecosystem benefits to the 80 percent of Americans who live in urban areas. Urban forests improve air and water quality, reduce energy use, enhance property values, and provide an array of health and wellness benefits to people. Creating and maintaining a healthy tree canopy also creates a substantial demand for green-collar jobs in a sector that's poised for rapid growth.

Since its expansion under the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act of 1990, the Urban and Community Forestry (U&CF) program has been a catalyst and an important technical adviser to promoting healthy green spaces in our communities. In 2010, the U&CF program delivered technical, financial, educational, and research assistance to 7,102 communities in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, U.S. territories, and affiliated Pacific Island nations. The program leveraged an additional \$40 million in state and local support, and provided 1,250 small grants to local communities.

While we are seeking to expand funds of up to \$100 million for urban forestry and green infrastructure, we understand the current economic conditions of the country and request \$32.4 million be allocated in FY12 to the Urban and Community Forestry program, consistent with the president's request. Following are the program's most important components:

- **Enhancing urban parks and community green spaces:** By partnering with communities, U&CF fosters strategic planting and active management of urban forests and is a key component of the president's America's Great Outdoors initiative. U&CF provides critical assistance to help communities manage risk, respond to storms and disturbances, and contain threats from invasive pests.
- **Improving air quality:** Trees absorb carbon dioxide, sulfur dioxide, nitrous oxides, and other pollutants and shade cars and parking lots, reducing ozone emissions from vehicles. Increasing urban tree cover helps meet a city's federal air quality compliance needs for ground-level ozone.
- **Reducing energy use:** Planting and preserving trees in communities is more cost effective than building new power plants. Properly placed, mature shade trees help save as much as 30 percent on electric cooling bills for homes. Tree windbreaks reduce residential heating costs 10–15 percent. By absorbing large amounts of harmful pollutants, shading buildings, and cooling the air, trees play an important role in air quality and energy efficiency.

- **Delivering clean water:** Urban trees reduce stormwater runoff and help municipalities meet EPA Clean Water requirements. Washington's public trees alone provide stormwater management benefits of \$3.7 million annually. U&CF helps promote clean water by reducing soil erosion and polluted stormwater runoff and creating healthier watersheds.
- **Green jobs:** The green industries — urban forestry; arboriculture; horticulture; landscape design, build, and maintenance; and other professions that support the urban forest landscape — have an estimated annual economic impact of \$147.8 billion and are growth industries that can provide tens of thousands of new jobs. The U&CF program supports well-paying and long-term jobs by leveraging state and local investments in green infrastructure. This support enables the public and private sectors to provide technical assistance, training, tree planting, maintenance, and survey activities.
- **Public health:** Access to trees, green spaces, and parks promotes greater physical activity, reduces stress, improves mental health, and reduces asthma risks.

**Key units:**

- Northern Station at Syracuse, N.Y. — urban forests, human health, and environmental quality
- Northern Station at Evanston, Ill. — social science supporting natural resource management and policy
- Northern Station Urban Natural Resources Institute at Burlington, Vt. — providing tools and information to quantify the value of trees and open space for decision makers
- Pacific Southwestern Station Center for Urban Forest Resources at Davis, Calif. — urban forest structure, benefits, and costs
- Pacific Southwestern Station at Riverside, Calif. — wild land interface and urban cultures
- Southern Station Centers for Urban and Interface Forestry at Gainesville, FL and Athens, Ga. — human and natural systems in urban and urbanizing landscapes

We also support investing \$18 million for urban natural resources research through Forest Service Research and Development. This request is consistent with the recommendations of the National Urban and Community Forestry Advisory Council to increase the Forest Service's investment to \$24 million for urban natural resources research by the year 2015. This program pioneered research on the effects of urban trees on air quality and quantified the effects of trees on temperature reduction, removal of air pollutants, reduced energy consumption, and the role of urban trees in reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Urban forests are integral to any community striving to reinvest in itself; encourage active, healthy citizens; and create a healthier and more sustainable environment with smart green infrastructure. There is significant return for each federal dollar spent, making U&CF a smart investment for Congress.

**REQUESTED ACTION:** Support allocation of \$32.4 million in FY12 to the Urban and Community Forestry program, consistent with the president's request. Also, support investing \$18 million for urban natural resources research through Forest Service Research and Development.