

# The Evergreen Communities Act

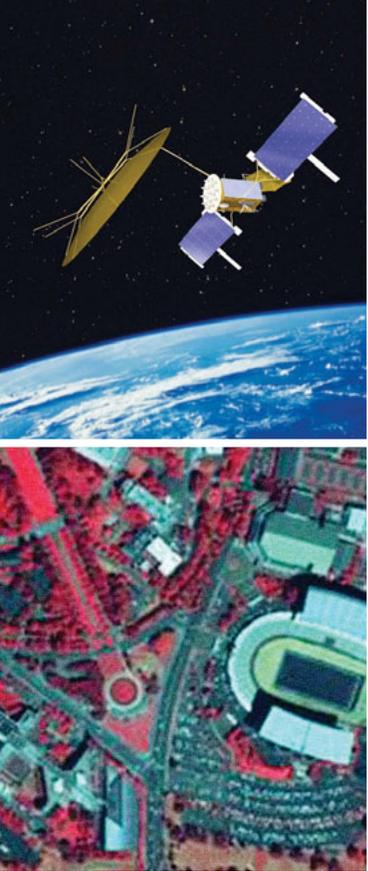
ESSHB 2844  
PROGRESS REPORT

WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES  
URBAN AND COMMUNITY FORESTRY  
JANUARY 2010

Healthy trees,  
healthy people,  
healthy communities.



WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF  
**Natural Resources**  
Peter Goldmark - Commissioner of Public Lands



Helping communities to develop quality urban forestry programming in order to realize maximum benefits and ecological services from the forestry resource.

**Above:** Satellite-based canopy inventory and analysis recently completed by the US Forest Service (USFS) demonstrates the benefits and value of community and urban forests in Washington.

Collectively, a community forest is comprised of the trees and vegetation lining our streets, growing in our parks and living in our back yards. It is the forest where we live, work, and play.

The Evergreen Communities Act (ECA) was enacted in 2008 to provide assistance to cities, towns, counties and tribes throughout Washington that wish to improve or enhance their urban and community forests in order to reap the many social, ecological, and economic benefits provided by urban trees, including an economically viable, vital and healthy community.

The ECA (ESSHB 2844) recognizes the many contributions of the state's urban and community forests, stating that the "preservation and enhancement of city trees and urban and community forests is one of the most cost-effective ways to protect and improve water quality, air quality, human well-being, and our quality of life."

The ECA provided funding and authority for Department of Natural Resources Urban & Community Forestry (UCF) Program and Department of Commerce (Commerce; formerly the Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development, or CTED) to

convene panels of experts to assist in the implementation of the Act. UCF was tasked to develop criteria and an implementation plan for a statewide urban forestry inventory and assessment, while Commerce was given the responsibility for model tree ordinances, management plans and an Evergreen Communities recognition program to distinguish communities that achieve basic standards for healthy, functional community forests.

The interlocking tools developed through the Act are intended to support the ECA directive to help communities establish quality urban forestry programming that provides maximum benefits and ecological services from the urban forestry resource. A key focus of the Act is to assist communities to develop the solid baseline documentation necessary to position themselves for participation in potential future carbon markets. Programs based on recommendations developed through the Act present unique opportunities for communities to achieve goals and objectives associated with climate change and sustainability initiatives in local governments.

This publication reports the work accomplished toward achieving the goals contained in the ECA and outlines recommendations that will be implemented once funding resumes.

## Urban Forestry Inventory and Assessment

Inventories and assessments provide critical information about the urban tree resource and are integral to developing management plans as well as creating ordinances and policies intended to care for, protect and expand the urban and community forest.

A prioritized criteria and implementation plan for a statewide assessment and inventory was developed by the Department of Natural Resources Urban & Community Forestry (UCF) Program with the assistance of a 15-member Technical Advisory Committee. The plan is separated into two components: a broad state-wide assessment and inventory, and a closer examination of local community resources within two pilot counties.

## Canopy Assessment and Analysis

Aerial and satellite imagery is used to evaluate urban tree canopy coverage. This spatial analysis identifies areas of existing tree canopy that may be impacted by growth, tracks cumulative canopy gains or loss over time, and classifies priority areas for canopy retention and tree planting. Spatial analysis includes an overview of public and private trees, essential to long-range planning of the entire community forest resource.

Satellite-based canopy assessment and analysis recently completed by the USDA Forest Service (USFS) illustrates the benefits and value of community and urban forests in Washington, including carbon storage estimated at \$515,300,000; annual carbon sequestration valued at \$16,986,000; and air pollution removal valued at \$156,100,000.<sup>1</sup>

To provide detail of the structure, function and value of trees, collection of ground data is necessary to complete the state-wide analysis of the urban and community forest resource. When funding of the Evergreen Communities Act (ECA) resumes, ground data will be collected by forestry professionals or highly trained volunteers using tools and protocol developed by USFS. Analysis of the data will be performed utilizing the i-Tree suite, a modeling tool developed by the USFS (see sidebar on right).

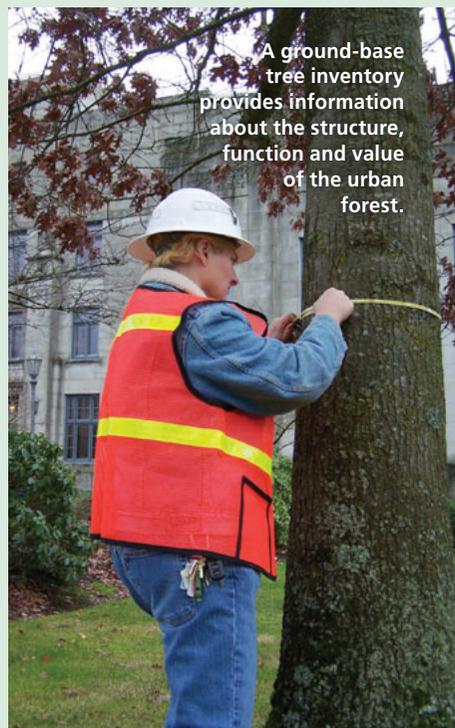
## Inventory and Assessment of Local Community Resources

Local management requires more detailed data than is possible using satellite imagery. As funding becomes available, UCF will partner with the University of Washington to develop analyses that combine DNR aerial photography with satellite imagery to assess tree canopy cover in communities within two pilot counties, Pierce and Spokane.

Communities within the two counties that are interested in detailed analysis of the structure, value and function of their tree resource may elect to participate in the pilot project by providing data from new or existing urban forest inventories that will be analyzed using i-Tree software.

A data table, created by the ECA Technical Advisory Committee, is available to communities preparing for resource inventories or assessments. The table, available through UCF, consists of data points common to most basic inventories. The table provides a template for designing street tree, park or natural area inventories that supply information necessary for designing management plans and assessing the value of the urban forestry resource.

<sup>1</sup> David Nowak, Research Forester, April 2009, personal communication, United States Forest Service Northern Research Station.



A ground-based tree inventory provides information about the structure, function and value of the urban forest.

LUIS PRADO/DNR

# Urban Forestry Analysis Using i-Tree

i-Tree is a state-of-the-art peer-reviewed software suite developed by the USFS that provides urban forestry analysis and assessment tools. i-Tree provides tools that help communities of all sizes to strengthen their urban forest management and advocacy efforts by quantifying the environmental services that trees provide.



Evaluating the local, tangible ecosystem services that trees provide allows i-Tree users to link urban forest management activities with environmental quality and community livability. Whether your interest is a single tree or an entire urban forest, i-Tree provides data analysis tools that can be used to demonstrate value and to set priorities for more effective decision-making.

i-Tree software is readily available as free public domain software at [itreetools.org](http://itreetools.org)

Inventory and analysis is essential to long-range planning of the community forest resource.



A community's identity is often defined by its trees.

# Community Assistance and Urban Forestry

The Department of Natural Resources Urban & Community Forestry (UCF) Program provides technical assistance to communities working toward developing healthy, sustainable urban and community forestry programs. Program staff are available to consult in the development of tree inventories; review community forest policies, ordinances, or management plans; and assist with steps necessary to attain Tree City USA designation.

Technical guidance is designed to help cities, towns, and tribes enhance the community forest in order to improve its capacity to manage stormwater, mitigate greenhouse gas emissions, lower the cost of heating and cooling of buildings, and provide the many other benefits of a well-managed urban and community forest.

Annual competitive grants are available through UCF for those communities interested in initiating community forestry inventories, or developing management plans and ordinances based on existing resource evaluations.

## For More Information

Washington State Department of Natural Resources  
Urban and Community Forestry  
**1-800-523-8733**  
[urban\\_forestry@dnr.wa.gov](mailto:urban_forestry@dnr.wa.gov)

## Managing and Planning for the Urban Forest

The Evergreen Communities Act (ECA) assigned specific responsibilities to Commerce, including the development of model tree ordinances and model urban forestry management plans, as well as the creation of an awards program. The awards program is intended to recognize those communities that work hard to develop excellent management programming that enhances the capacity of their urban and community forests to provide a wide range of ecological, social, and economic services.

Twenty Evergreen Community Partnership Task Force (Task Force) members were selected to assist Commerce staff in this assignment. Task Force members represented a broad range of agencies and organizations impacted by community and urban forestry planning and regulation.

Prior to the elimination of funding, the Task Force worked diligently to develop interim guidance for local jurisdictions that desire to better manage and plan for improvements to their urban and community forests. The result, *A Guide to Community and Urban Forestry Programming*, is available online at <http://www.commerce.wa.gov/site/1131/default.aspx>.

The recommendations and resources in this annotated document provide an excellent foundation for local jurisdictions to establish, expand or enhance urban forestry programming. The document also includes the Task Force's recommended framework for an Evergreen Communities recognition program.

## Evergreen Community Recognition

The ECA lists a variety of infrastructure and environmental grants and loans available through several state agencies that will provide preferential consideration to applications from communities that have achieved recognition as Evergreen Communities. The incentives will become operational one year *after* adoption of the model management plans and ordinances developed by Commerce staff and the Task Force. As with the rest of the ECA, this portion is on hold due to suspension of funding.

During the current funding hiatus, communities anticipating participation in the Evergreen Communities recognition program may begin by working toward becoming a Tree City USA; the four Tree City USA standards are similar to the first four requirements for Evergreen Communities recognition. A fifth standard is completion of a community and urban forest inventory.



WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF **Natural Resources**



DNR Community Forestry Program educates citizens and decision-makers about the economic, environmental, psychological and aesthetic benefits of trees and assists local governments, citizen groups and volunteers in planting and sustaining healthy trees and vegetation wherever people live and work in Washington State.

The DNR Community Forestry Program is an equal opportunity provider.

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