

# Bring Nature to Every Neighborhood

Why? Because livable, healthy, economically-vital communities grow on it.



Mature trees near homes save up to 30% on summer cooling bills, 25% on winter heating.

Trees can increase home property values by as much as 10%.

Chicago's urban forest (over 3.5 million trees) removes about 888 tons of air pollution per year, including sulfur dioxide equal to emissions from 110,400 cars.

Children living in areas of the city with more street trees have a lower prevalence of asthma.

Green industries have estimated economic impact of \$147.8 billion – and can provide tens of thousands of new jobs as arborists, urban foresters, landscape design, development and maintenance.

Minneapolis' nearly 199,000 street trees, alone, reduce storm water management costs in the city by \$9 million a year.

All of this is possible only with energetic action from citizens, and support from all levels of government.



Sustainable Urban Forests Coalition

[www.urbanforestcoalition.org](http://www.urbanforestcoalition.org)

References available.

Members of the Sustainable Urban Forest Coalition believe better stewardship of urban natural resources can achieve vital national goals: job creation, energy independence, vibrant local economies, clean water and healthy watersheds, , reduction in obesity, and improved air quality and public health. In framing our Farm Bill agenda, we considered three questions:

1. What are the highest priority needs expressed by citizens and policymakers in local communities? What challenges do they face in bringing nature to their neighborhoods?
2. How can Federal resources be delivered cost-effectively to promote “green infrastructure” solutions to urban environmental, health and economic priorities?
3. Given the current fiscal climate, what steps might Congress take in the 2012 Farm Bill to meet these needs without additional net spending – creating jobs and saving money for citizens, as well as Federal, state and local governments.

## Why act through the Farm Bill?

Simply put, USDA and the Forest Service – whose programs are authorized via the Farm Bill – bring unique strengths to the roster of Federal agencies now incentivizing and funding green infrastructure programs.

EPA, DOE, HUD, DOT, CDC, and DOI each interact with and fund different stakeholder agencies at the state and local level. Likewise, communities of all sizes mount their own extensive urban forestry and green infrastructure initiatives; often they note the difficulties encountered in mixing and matching different Federal programs to address comprehensive green infrastructure needs.

We believe that USDA and the Forest Service – with its unparalleled research capacity and its strong network of public and private partnerships<sup>1</sup> – can play an even more significant role to help focus and promote *efficient* Federal investment in creating and maintaining healthy urban forests and green infrastructure.

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<sup>1</sup> With support and expertise from state forestry agencies, local and national non-governmental organizations, the Forest Service in 2010 provided assistance to over 7,000 communities, reaching a total of 177 million people. *USDA Forest Service. 2011. Fiscal Year 2012 President's Budget Justification.*

## Step One:

### Encourage and facilitate interagency coordination to protect urban forest health

*Enables agencies to manage costs by setting mutually-agreed-to Federal priorities, roles and responsibilities.*

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SUFC urges Congress to consider actions that improve coordination among USDA programs and other Federal agencies charged with delivering urban forestry and green infrastructure programs at the national, state and local levels. By breaking down restrictive agency boundaries and facilitating multi-agency coordination and collaboration, the next Farm Bill can help federal, regional and local agencies more effectively and efficiently implement cost-saving and sustainable infrastructure in communities of all sizes.

➔ **Establish regional or metropolitan area “coordination teams” under USDA auspices with participation from various federal agencies** (e.g., USFS, EPA, NRCS, DOT, DOE, HUD) to share priorities and explore opportunities for cooperative action on green infrastructure initiatives at the rural and metropolitan scales. To test this concept:

- Direct the Secretary, after consultation with other departments, to form up to three pilot teams. Teams should include regional representation from Federal agencies, leaders from both large and smaller urban jurisdictions and/or metropolitan planning organizations, state forester or their designee and state conservationists;
- Empower the teams to develop plans for coordinated action; and
- Require the Secretary to report on results after two years.

➔ **Continue and improve efforts to monitor urban forest health, and to prevent threats from invasive insects and disease** that can spread beyond urban boundaries. Pests and other invasive species are often first detected in urban areas. Early detection in urban settings can prevent huge expenditures for later eradication.

- Maintain continued funding (\$50 million/year) as authorized for the Early Plant Pest Detection and Surveillance Improvement Program (Section 10201, 2008 Farm Bill).
- Support an APHIS (Animal and Plant Health Inspection Services) study on efficacy of import safeguards. Congress should explicitly express its support for an APHIS top-to-bottom assessment of current rules regarding imports – most of which move through urban settings – especially those prone to harbor forest invasive species.

## Step Two

### Address issues at the landscape level, promote urban trees and forests as green infrastructure

*Enables coordination among urban and rural initiatives to restore, protect and maintain watershed health.*

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The SUFC supports efforts in the next Farm Bill that include a strong role for urban forests—in connection with rural forests – to deliver clean water to downstream communities.

No ecological boundaries separate urban, community and rural forests. Pests, disease and invasives spread easily from city to suburb to village to rural forests. Likewise, rural and urban forests play vital, indivisible roles in delivering clean water to all communities; they provide fiscally-sound green solutions to the management of stormwater, water storage, groundwater recharge, pollutant reduction and wildlife habitat.

→ **Prioritize funding to conservation, urban forestry, land protection, watershed health, and green infrastructure programs built on comprehensive, landscape-level plans.** Strongest consideration should be afforded to programs that:

- encompass both urban and rural areas;
- offer integrated solutions to priorities identified in multiple plans, including state forest action plans, state wildlife action plans, state watershed and water quality plans, invasive pest plans, and metropolitan-level or regional plans.

→ **Reauthorize the Watershed Forestry Assistance Program (16 U.S.C 2103b) with program delivery guided by State Forest Action Plans.** This cost-share program supports projects in urban and rural areas that use trees and forests as solutions to water quality problems. Funding for the program will be contingent on future appropriations.

→ **Authorize the Secretary to provide immediate technical and/or financial assistance** to local governments to recover from catastrophic storms, floods and fire by restoring urban forest resources.

## Step Three

### **Provide research, tools and resources that support local initiatives, minimize overall costs and maximize impacts for every dollar invested**

*Municipal governments, metropolitan planners and non-governmental organizations can more effectively marshal resources in their own communities with common baseline data and metrics for measuring urban forest benefits.*

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Congress should ensure that the USDA Forest Service places a high priority on urban forest research that develops best management practices as well as technical tools and information to assist local partners, including state and local agencies, private companies, non-profit organizations, and private citizens. Tools can help local policymakers establish priorities, direct resources, and help assure more efficient use of Federal funds – whether from USDA or from other agencies, including EPA. In the next Farm Bill, Congress should insure that Forest Service authorities provide for:

- **Continued development and improvement of user-friendly tools**, such as i-Tree<sup>2</sup>, that demonstrate the value of and help plan for locally-focused initiatives.
- **Demonstration projects that illustrate application of best management practices** and emerging technology in a variety of “all-lands” settings.
- **Strong technology transfer, education, and information activities** related to urban forest research through USDA programs such as cooperative extension, conservation education and collaborative public-private efforts such as i-Tree.
- **Creating consistent data standards for urban forests and green infrastructure** that enable federal agencies, states, and localities to assess urban forest conditions and trends, establish baseline urban tree canopy levels, and provide support for related urban forest inventory and monitoring programs. Common standards eliminate conflicting agency protocols, prevent development of costly duplicative systems, enable local communities to participate in data collection, and allow for comprehensive assessment of returns from green infrastructure investments. Congress should direct USDA Forest Service to develop **urban tree/forest baseline data through enhancements to the Forest Inventory and Analysis Program**.
- **Reaffirm role of USDA’s Office of Environmental Markets in developing measures for ecosystem services provided by urban as well as rural forests** (e.g. carbon sequestration, air quality, energy conservation, water quality, and stormwater abatement) as provided for in the 2008 Farm Bill.

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<sup>2</sup>i-Tree is a suite of tools that helps policymakers, planners and practitioners assess, plan for and quantify the benefits of investment in urban forests.  
[www.itreetools.org](http://www.itreetools.org)