

**Forever Green: Urban and Community Forestry in Washington State**  
**February 18, 2009**

**Program Purpose**

The Washington State Urban and Community Forestry Program works to educate citizens and decision-makers about the economic, environmental, psychological and aesthetic benefits of trees and to assist local governments, citizen groups and volunteers in planting and sustaining healthy trees and vegetation wherever people live and work in Washington State.

**Mission**

Provide leadership to create self-sustaining urban and community forestry programs that preserve, plant and manage forests and trees for public benefits and quality of life.

February 18, 2009

Dear Interested Reader,

This strategic plan is the culmination of many hours of work and dialogue among a large number of individuals involved in urban and community forestry in Washington State. Members of the Washington Community Forestry Council (WCFC) reflected on the program's past accomplishments and challenges. The result is a vision for urban and community forestry in Washington, and method by which to attain it.

This plan was written to serve as a dynamic tool, not a static one. It should retain the flexibility to adapt itself to the landscape in which it operates. This strategic plan sets a course of action for the Washington Urban and Community Forestry (U&CF) Program. It also serves as a tool to communicate that course of action to the U&CF program's various stakeholders around the state, the region and the country. In addition to its communication function, this plan will be used as a progress assessment tool for the U&CF program.

The plan has two major sections: the Preamble and the Strategic Action Plan. The Preamble summarizes the history of the U&CF program in Washington State. It also addresses a number of the program's strengths and challenges, while demonstrating the need for the program. The Preamble contains much of the baseline information about the program and the rich and wonderful state it serves. The Strategic Action Plan is the technical action oriented section of the plan. It enumerates the activities which will ultimately lead to the attainment of the five major goals.

As you read through this document, consider how you can take action and provide leadership to the citizens of Washington State in creating self-sustaining urban and community forestry programs that preserve, plant, and manage forests and trees for public benefits and quality of life.

Sincerely,

Sarah Foster  
Program Manager  
Urban & Community Forestry Program

## Preamble

The State of Washington's population has doubled in the past 50 years, and if projections hold true, Washington State will be home to more than 11 million people by the year 2050. That would mean adding the equivalent of 29 cities the size of Tacoma or Spokane. Those 29 cities will not be new cities, but rather, established cities with ever increasing urban densities sprawling beyond their urban growth boundaries. This increased population will need places to live, work, and play. These people will also demand fresh air, clean water, as well as places of respite and beauty. Washington State Urban and Community Forestry (U&CF) Program cannot address all of the issues that will arise, but it can and will be part of the solution.

In 1990, Congress amended the 1978 Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act making available United States Forest Service (USFS) grant funds for urban and community forestry programs. Ten years later, the USFS is still the primary source of funding for the U&CF Program. In May of 1991, the Washington Community Forestry Council (WCFC) hired a private consulting firm to facilitate a planning process which produced "Community and Urban Forestry in the State of Washington: Strategic Plan." That document laid out goals and a direction which were pursued and achieved during the following five years. In the year 2000, the U&CF program, along with the WCFC, developed four goals which they felt would address the needs of Washington State's Communities and Community Forests. In 2008, the WCFC revisited the goals set, added a new goal, and revised the plan to ensure the program is addressing current issues facing Washington's urban and community forests.

The goals fall under five main headings:

**Goal One: Provide Leadership**

*Provide leadership to decision makers and agencies on the development and implementation of urban and community related activities.*

**Goal Two: Promote Education and Outreach**

*Increase the level of understanding, protection and management of Washington's community trees and native vegetation while increasing the number of people involved in urban and community forestry activities.*

**Goal Three: Provide Financial and Technical Assistance**

*Secure sustainable funding sources to provide high quality public service from U&CF program staff and the best information to our clients.*

**Goal Four: Build U&CF program Capacity**

*Develop additional monetary support for the U&CF program and the people it serves.*

**Goal Five: Plant Trees**

*Encourage the planting of more trees and appropriate follow-up management. The ability to achieve this goal is a natural outcome of success in the first four goals.*

Trees provide us with a multitude of benefits everyday, from clean water and air, to safe and livable communities. Some of these benefits are easier to assign values to, but all of them are important. The U&CF program must work with the WCFC, Washington cities and towns, and their citizens to ensure Washington's future is not burdened with the task and expense of restoring an irreparably degraded ecosystem. The work of constructing a legacy of green must begin immediately, for everyday that goes by is an opportunity lost. As the proverb goes, "the best time to plant a tree was twenty years ago, the second best time is today." The following is a framework to help communicate and realize a legacy of green for the State of Washington.

### **Goal 1 Provide Leadership**

*Provide leadership to decision makers and agencies on the development and implementation of urban and community related activities.*

The U&CF program and the WCFC have a long history of providing leadership in the urban forestry community. By providing consistent technical information based on sound science, the U&CF program has helped build urban forestry programs across Washington. This goal is important to ensure that all Washington communities have access to this information and are given the tools necessary to manage their urban and community forests for maximum benefits. Current information will continue to be made available to decision makers at all levels.

### **Goal 2 Promote Outreach and Education**

*Increase the level of understanding, protection and management of Washington's community trees and native vegetation while increasing the number of people involved in U&CF activities.*

There is a large amount of existing information on the multiple benefits of community trees as well as the proper care and management of those resources. The U&CF program possesses much of this information. If we are to attain our goal of education and outreach, it is imperative that this information be disseminated. The U&CF program staff will continue to assemble urban forestry books and articles and make its contents available electronically or for loan to individuals. Program staff will publicize the availability of these materials as a resource by continuing to publish both quarterly and bi-monthly newsletters, and via the Internet. The U&CF program will work to make its contents more accessible by initiating and utilizing opportunities to share this information at speaking engagements, educational fairs, and U&CF workshops.

As the state's population increases so will the number of young people in Washington. The U&CF program plans to continue its activity with the ever increasing number of children. They are, after all, the future stewards of the resources we leave behind. There are many educational programs available. The U&CF program will build on previous work that has been done in order to increase its reach. Interest in programs such as the National Arbor Day's 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Poster Contest have increased over in the past years. The U&CF program will build on its successes to increase the transfer of information to Washington's future.

Another aspect of education deals with strengthening the foundation built by the U&CF program within the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the WCFC. While Arbor Day activities and the Evergreen Communities Act have raised awareness within DNR, there are still DNR employees are not aware of the U&CF program. This lack of awareness creates a barrier when the U&CF program is trying to increase the level of education about the benefits of trees. The number of Tree City USA cities is increasing each year. There are going to be an increasing number of opportunities for agency employees to take an active role in U&CF program activities some time during the year. In order to be more effective and efficient, the U&CF program will need the assistance of a greater number of DNR employees and WCFC members to publicize the Program and expound the benefits of self-sustaining U&CF programs.

### **Goal 3 Provide Financial and Technical Assistance**

*Maintain high quality public service from U&CF program staff and provide the best information to our clients.*

During the first decade of the U&CF program there was a large amount of employee turnover; this has stabilized in the past decade. Over the past several years, the personnel has been consistent and the relationships with stakeholders reaffirmed. These relationships form the basis for many of the technical assistance referrals the U&CF program receives. By maintaining the staffing consistency and by keeping staff updated on urban forestry science, the U&CF program can provide the highest level of technical service to its clients.

Communication methods such as the “Tree Link Hotline” and the Internet site are both effective ways for people to access the U&CF program’s technical and financial resources. Use of both of these access points will continue to increase. Further publicizing the availability of these communication avenues should provide for greater U&CF program accessibility.

The U&CF program plans to use hard data to assist communities with the management of their urban forests. Many cities in Washington have conducted urban forest inventories. There are also several parts of the state where no data have been collected. There has never been a state-wide compilation of results and needs. Many community leaders are interested in “getting a handle” on their community’s urban forest resources in order to assist them in long-range decision making. There are many urban forest inventory software and database programs on the market. Coupling these inventory systems with geographic information systems opens up the possibility of reporting on the tree resources needing management and the available human and financial resources available for comprehensive management. Research and reporting of all inventory efforts will result in the development of a cohesive and coordinated management strategy for the entire state’s urban forests.

There are more than 280 incorporated cities and towns in Washington State. Less than

seventy-five of those cities and towns have operational tree protection and management ordinances. The U&CF program has, on file, over one hundred of those tree protection and management ordinances and several others from around the country. In working with Washington's communities and with the Department of Community Trade and Economic Development, the U&CF program plans to enhance the strength and number of tree protection and management ordinances. The model ordinances and management plans called for in the Evergreen Communities Act will help the U&CF U&CF program achieve the goal of having sound tree management occurring in all Washington Communities.

The U&CF program will continue to pass along a portion of its grant from the USFS in the form of grants to municipalities, non-profits, educational institutions, and tribal governments.

Much of the work that is done in urban forestry in Washington is performed by a limited number of committed and enthusiastic volunteers. The U&CF program is going to seek out these volunteer organizations to help them strengthen their ability to utilize their human resources, and further the mission of the U&CF program.

#### **Goal 4      Build the Program's Capacity**

*Develop additional monetary support for the U&CF program and the people it serves.*

One of the largest obstacles facing communities attempting to initiate and carry out local urban forestry programs is money. The Washington Community Forestry Assistance Grants were once an obscure financial resource for cities, non-profits, tribal governments and educational institutions. Currently, the grant program generates so much interest that the dollars requested in a single grant cycle exceed the entire U&CF program's yearly budget. The grant program will continue, but, without increased funding, there will be significant unmet needs. By increasing efforts in seeking funding outside of DNR, the U&CF program hopes to increase the number of dollars available for urban and community forestry projects around the state.

A major challenge facing the U&CF program is the fact that the USFS is still its primary source of funding. Working with the WCFC and the DNR, the U&CF program plans to continue inform Washington's decision makers about the benefits of trees and community forests, as well as the benefits of an active U&CF program at the state level. The U&CF program had a victory with the 2008 passage of the Evergreen Communities Act; however, funding is not expected to continue in the near future. Staff will continue to work with partners on the deliverables of the Act, however, progress will be slower than originally anticipated.

Partnership opportunities with non-profits around the region can also give individuals and foundations the ability to contribute financially to the U&CF program, with tax donation benefits. This is something that has not happened in the past because the U&CF program has had no close association with a 501c(3) non-profit organization.

Preamble

Page 7

The U&CF program will continue to work with non-profit organizations in hopes that one day Washington will have a state wide urban forestry non-profit.

## **Goal 5      Plant Trees**

*Encourage the planting of more trees and appropriate follow-up management.*

Funding is a major obstacle communities face regarding effective tree planting and management programs. The U&CF program intends to enhance its mechanisms for financially supporting tree planting programs. However, the U&CF program will not assist with the purchasing of new trees unless there is a local commitment of at least three-years of management.

The U&CF program has alliances with many organizations in the State that promote and train individuals on proper plant health care. These organizations will receive continued support from the U&CF program. Electronic communication methods as well as the Program's newsletters will serve as means by which the Program will ensure the trees are planted and managed using the best possible science.

### Conclusion:

The U&CF program has a rich history in Washington State. Many success stories provide evidence that urban and community forestry is an idea whose time has come. There are, however, many obstacles still to be surmounted. As the population of the state continues to grow so will the demand on the state's diverse natural resources. The U&CF program must address urban resource issues with the best possible information and adequate fiscal resources.

Since its inception in 1991, the WCFC and its partners have continued to provide strong support for the U&CF program. Small Business Administration Grants, the Urban Initiative Grants, and the Community Forestry Assistance Grants have provided financial assistance to municipalities, non-profits, educational institutions, and tribal governments, and interest in such programs has increased immensely. Participation in the Tree City USA Program continues to expand. Requests for educational and technical assistance from U&CF program staff are steadily increasing, due to outreach activities and the presentation of solid urban forestry information in the form of the Tree Link Newsletter and the Tree Link News Bulletin.

Amid the U&CF program's many successes, there are still many challenges at the state and local level. As the state's population continues to expand, so will the need for new ways of thinking about residential and commercial development. This growth will also mean increased pressure on quality of life factors such as: liveable cities, open spaces, and clean air and water, just to name a few.

The Evergreen State is endowed with a diverse mixture of people and places. The U&CF program will reach out to both traditional and non-traditional audiences for our

Preamble

Page 8

educational, technical, and financial assistance. In doing so, the U&CF program hopes to fulfill the goals laid out in this plan and facilitate the creation of self-sustaining urban and community forestry programs that preserve, plant and manage forests and trees for public benefits and quality of life.



# Strategic Action Plan

## Five Year Plan

### **Provide Leadership**

#### Goals:

- DNR shall continue role as lead agency on all U&CF issues
- Actively participate in ECA Task Force
- Support and promote ongoing legislation and funding requests
- Foster greater diversity of interests represented on the WCFC

#### Action Items:

- The WCFC should facilitate the evaluation of the U&CF program on an established regular basis
- Encourage communities to support for urban and community legislation at federal, state and local levels
- Promptly identify replacements to maintain a full WCFC

### **Promote Education and Outreach**

#### Goals:

- Every jurisdiction in Washington is aware of the Tree City USA, Tree Line USA, Tree Campus USA and the Evergreen Communities Recognition programs, as well as the resources the U&CF program offers
- Every jurisdiction in Washington understands that maintenance is important and maintenance is included in their forestry programs.
- Residents understand and support U&CF program's role in their community

#### Action Items:

- Create one clear, focused message to be used throughout the U&CF program
- Initiate focused awareness campaign for recognition programs
- Create a public education plan that illustrates U&CF program's success and justifies the need for program
- Create a public involvement plan that includes ways for the public to ask questions and provide feedback
  - online comment form
  - listening forum
  - open houses
- Expand WCFC and U&CF program awareness through invitations to more organizations
- Continue outreach to non-traditional urban and community groups to developed a variety of potential partners
- Connect with the local chapter of United States Green Building Council (USGBC) to encourage more U&CF in the LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) program

### **Provide Financial and Technical Assistance**

#### Goals:

- The statewide U&CF inventory provides standardized platform for gathering and maintaining data
- U&CF program offerings to local communities are increased.
- Maintain and disseminate current information on the trends and conditions in urban and community forestry
- Urban and community forests are required under the Growth Management Act.

#### Action Items:

- Give local programs the tools needed to procure local funding through a step-by-step guide for local funding

- Upon completion of the ECA Technical Advisory Committee work, establish a data collection sub-committee on the WCFC to ensure continuity
- Increase technical support and available resources for cities and counties through additional U&CF program staff

### **Build U&CF Program Capacity**

Goals:

- Staff size is at least eight persons, with a representative in every DNR region
- Administer a minimum \$500,000 annual grant program
- The U&CF program is integrated so that the transition to future Commissioners of Public Lands is seamless

Action Items

- Develop funding opportunities list with potential partners
- Secure sustainable funding for a \$500,000 grant program
- Continue WCFC's legislative sub-committee
- Participate actively on the Evergreen Communities Partnership Task Force and other committees
- Provide guidance and share experiences from existing successful award and outreach programs
- Support and promote ongoing legislation and funding requests
- Promote use of model ordinances and management plans related to urban and community forestry issues
- Implement ECA inventory and assessment

### **Plant Trees**

Goals:

- Provide funding opportunities to assist communities
- Assure trees are being planted correctly and managed throughout the critical establishment period

### **Ten-year goals**

Action items shall be determined and evaluated by WCFC and U&CF program staff within five years of adoption of this plan.

### **Promote Education and Outreach**

Goals:

- Urban and Community Forestry is in the Washington state curricula (early education, becomes engrained). Young learners know the cause of their actions and are accountable
- Every city in Washington has a fully funded U&CF program
- Every county in Washington has a fully funded U&CF program

### **Provide Financial and Technical Assistance**

Goals:

- We have a fully functional inventory in all cities and counties
- The DNR program is 100% funded by the state. Federal funding is primarily used for grants
- There is one U&CF coordinator for each DNR Region of Washington

### **Build Program Capacity**

Goals:

- DNR has U&CF staff to effectively provide technical assistance and administration to all Washington departments, agencies, communities and residents
- Administer a minimum \$1,000,000 annual grant program

### **Long-Term Goals (10+ years)**

Action items shall be determined and evaluated by WCFC and U&CF program staff after ten years of adoption of this plan.

- Every elected official acknowledges the issues regarding urban and community forests in decision-making
- Every household has convenient access to an urban and community forest
- Every household understands the need for funding for those urban and community forests
- There is more than one university research and education program supporting urban and community forestry and arboriculture within the State of Washington
- The program has a role in the alternative fuel industry and carbon markets
- Urban and community forests become available for other uses/opportunities