3.9 Manage Woodlands and Urban Forests

5 – 50 Points

Action Updates

This action was last updated in 2024. A version of this action from the prior program year is available for comparison. Edits are highlighted in yellow.

Objective

Plan and implement projects to increase tree cover and enhance tree, forest, and woodland health. Ensure equitable distribution of tree cover and access to woodlands.

What to Do

1. Establish a Forestry Advisory Committee (FAC) or similar group that meets regularly to manage woodlands and urban forests in your municipality. This may be structured as a formal Committee or as a group that may include a municipal tree warden, public works, municipal staff, nonprofit organizations, council of governments, a state Certified Forester, or local volunteers and organizations. You may also leverage an existing group, such as your Sustainability Team, to fulfill this purpose. The group can be regional and comprised of multiple municipalities or represent one single municipality. Ensure your FAC or similar group is reflective of diverse perspectives and experiences from your municipality. This should include age, race, gender identity, religion, family status, immigration status, language, etc. The committee must be active and meet at least annually. **(5 points)**

   Submit: A list of names and titles/sectors of current members of the FAC OR equivalent group, the date of the most recent meeting, and at least one additional piece of documentation related to the meetings, such as a promotional flyer, an agenda, minutes, presentations, or photographs.

2. Inventory and plan for sustainable and equitable woodlands and urban forests.

   The more you do, the more points you earn. **(up to 30 points)**

   a. Through land cover assessments, evaluate tree cover in your municipality and ground-truth assessments with site visits. Establish general categories to describe trees in sites where your governing body and tree warden have direct responsibility, such as: street trees, parks, open space, municipally owned forests/woodlands, etc. You can also assess the extent of tree cover on private properties and on non-municipally owned public property (e.g., state highway land, state park land). Placing tree cover into various categories makes it easier to determine specific areas of focus. See Appendix A for data and information on assessing tree cover. **(10 points)**

   Note: This subaction is not to complete a formal tree inventory. For a formal tree inventory, please see subaction 3.9.2 c below.

   Submit: A completed worksheet 1. If your land cover assessment was completed more than three years ago, also include a brief description of how it is still relevant and used by your municipality.

   b. Complete a review of your municipal policy, priorities, and practices on woodlands and urban forests. **(10 points)**

   - Identify municipal priorities relating to tree planting programs.

- Review existing municipal policies and practices regarding trees and forests within the municipality and where additional policies or practices need to be implemented based on identified priorities.
- Determine whether your community needs to develop additional policies and implementation plans related to planting plans, tree diversity, property development, tree maintenance, the use of forested and wooded areas for recreation and other purposes, and other priority areas relating to the management of public trees. Develop those policies as needed, as recommendations to your municipality.
- Establish a set of specific goals for your community to achieve regarding its trees and forests. This plan should reference needed resources and funding.

See Appendix B for a list of guiding questions on priorities for a community tree program and Appendix C for a list of guiding questions on tree assessments, and complete the questions in worksheet 2.

Submit: A completed worksheet 2. If your policy review was completed more than three years ago, also include a brief description of how it is still relevant and used by your municipality.

c. Complete a tree inventory. This inventory should include, at a minimum, the location, with GPS unit and coordinates; species scientific name; and diameter at breast height (DBH). **(10 points)**

Submit: A completed tree inventory for your municipality. If your land tree inventory was completed more than three years ago, also include a brief description of how it is still relevant and used by your municipality.

d. Complete a Forest Management Plan, which may be related to a specific parcel or your entire municipality. Some examples of goals include sustainable timber harvest, management of native healthy trees, equitable public access. See Appendix D for a list of guiding questions. **(10 points)**

Submit: A completed Forest Management Plan and documentation of the plan adoption (such as meeting minutes, an internal memo, or similar verification). If your Forest Management Plan was adopted more than three years ago, also include a brief description of how it is still relevant and used by your municipality.

3. Implement at least two best practices and programs to manage and create equitable and sustainable woodlands and urban forests. Examples of programs eligible for points under this Action are listed below. These best practices and programs must have been implemented in the last three years. **(15 points)**

   - Implement one of the ordinance recommendations identified in your review of municipal policy (action 3.9.2.b above).
   - Perform an assessment of the tree health and condition, as a supplemental element to your tree inventory (action 3.9.2.a above).
   - Provide proactive maintenance to existing trees within your municipality, such as a pruning program for existing trees.
   - Complete a tree planting and maintenance program in your municipality that addresses extreme or urban heat, stormwater management, or another climate change issue.
   - Complete a tree planting program in your municipality that increases tree equity and/or access to green space.
   - Complete a management project in municipal woodlands; this could include invasive species removal, stewardship, or care. This may include tree planting, but planting projects should be focused on promoting health of existing trees and natural regeneration.
   - Sponsor or host education or workforce development program related to best practices in tree planting and management of urban woodlands and forests (such as tree planting programs, visioning programs on local needs, engaging historically excluded groups in conversations shaping municipal tree planting priorities).

   Note: Activities that are used to earn points toward this Action may not be used to earn points toward any other Sustainable CT event or training action (i.e., no "double-counting").

   Submit: Documentation that shows completion of an activity (including dates of completion) that supports your community's woodlands and forests; if implementing one of the examples above, please include all

elements listed for that bullet. This subaction is included in the Sustainable CT Climate Leader Designation.

Engaging Partners

Sustainable CT encourages regional collaboration and other forms of partnership. For every action, please complete the "Partners" box in your submission, indicating the name(s) of any municipalities and/or organizations you partnered with (if any) and a brief description of your municipality's role. If you collaborate with other municipalities, each community will receive points. For additional information, please see the "Partners Guidance Document".

Potential Municipal and Community Collaborators

Staff from the planning and zoning and public works departments could be helpful in implementing this action.

In addition, the tree warden, planning and zoning commission, conservation commission, local organizations (such as schools and Neighborhood Revitalization Zones), council of governments, and local land trust(s) could help implement this action.

Funding

If available, below are potential funding sources specific to this Action. For a complete listing of potential funding opportunities to assist with implementing Sustainable CT Actions, please visit the Sustainable CT Grants Portal, which is searchable by Action. Please also visit the Support for Your Town page for opportunities for technical assistance and other supports.

- Urban Act Grant Program
- Sustainable CT Community Match Fund
- State Funding Readiness Project
- Trees for Communities Grant Program

Resources

Toolkits, Calculators, Guidance Documents, General Information

- Statewide Resources to Manage Woodlands and Urban Forests - Sustainable CT webinar with staff from the CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection Forestry Division
- CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, "Trees and Urban Forests: Learn More"
- CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, "Agriculture, Forestry and Connecticut's Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Act"
- Tree Cover Tools and Resources for Tree Inventories:
  - UConn, Center for Land Use Education and Research
  - UConn, Center for Land Use Education and Research, CT High Res Land Cover
  - iTree Canopy
  - iTree Landscape
  - Vibrant Cities Lab, Street tree Inventory
  - Tree Keeper, City of New Haven Tree Inventory
- Environmental Justice Tools:
  - American Forests, "Tree Equity Score"
  - US Environmental Protection Agency, Environmental Justice Screening and Mapping Tool
  - CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, Connecticut 2022 Environmental Justice Communities
- Resources for Forest Management Plans:
  - Connecticut Forest and Park Association, CT Forestry Services Directory - Find a forestry practitioner in your region
  - CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, Service Forestry in CT - Schedule a visit with a DEEP service forester to get advice on the management of municipal forestlands
- Resources for Tree Planting:
  - CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, Connecticut Tree Owner's Manual
  - CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, State Vegetation Management Task Force Final

Report
    - UConn College of Agriculture, Health and Natural Resources Plant Database
- Resources for Tree Ordinances:
    - CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, "Urban Forestry for Municipalities, Plans, Goals, Policies and Ordinances"
    - International Society of Arboriculture, Guidelines for Developing and Evaluating Tree Ordinances
    - CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, "Connecticut Tree Wardens"
    - American Public Works Association, Urban Forestry Best Management Practices for Public Works Managers: Ordinances, Regulations, & Public Policies
    - Arbor Day Foundation, Sample Tree City Ordinance
- Statewide Forest Goals and Plans:
    - Peracchio, Dan. "Connecticut's Forest Action Plan 2020"
    - Governor's Council on Climate Change, "Forests Sub-Group Report"

Organizations and Relevant Programs

- Tree Wardens Association of Connecticut
- Connecticut Urban Forest Council
- CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, Urban Forestry Program
- Arbor Day Foundation, Tree City USA
- Yale School of the Environment, Urban Resources Initiative
- Eastern Connecticut Forest Landowners Association/Wolf Den Land Trust
- Connecticut Conservation Districts
- CT Environmental Conditions Online

Benefits

Forests and street trees bring many values to a community, including:

- Improving air quality by absorbing carbon dioxide and other pollutants,
- Shading (which reduces urban heat island effect),
- Providing habitat for animals and birds,
- Beautification,
- Creating a sense of place, and
- Enhancing safety (for example, the presence of street trees reduces urban traffic speeds).

CT Success Stories

- Essex - Oct 2022 Certification
- New London - Oct 2022 Certification
- New Haven - Sep 2023 Certification
- Bristol - Oct 2024 Certification
- Milford - Oct 2024 Certification
- Vernon - May 2025 Certification