

April 29, 2024

Rep. Mike Simpson (R-ID), Chairman

Rep. Chellie Pingree (D-ME), Ranking Member

House Appropriations Committee

Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Subcommittee

Dear Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree and Members of the Subcommittee:

Our nation's current and expanding 138 million acres of urban and community forests and trees are key to supporting healthy, livable, and thriving communities of all sizes. Members of the Sustainable Urban Forests Coalition (SUFC) and its extended network urge you to continue championing robust funding for the USDA Forest Service Urban and Community Forestry program and other programs that support and protect neighborhood and community trees and green infrastructure.

United by our passion and commitment to the power and potential of trees and urban forests, SUFC comprises 40 organizations and corporations representing hundreds of thousands of professionals and millions of supporters who understand the value and return on investment of planting and maintaining trees where people live. From the multi-billion-dollar tree-care industry and state forestry professionals to a wide variety of professional associations including arborists, city planners, and public works professionals as well as forest, conservation, recreation, and water nonprofit organizations, SUFC embodies the strength and diversity of the sector.

Urban and community forests and trees provide a multitude of scientifically proven social, economic, and environmental benefits to people, wildlife, and businesses. The ability to reduce air pollution and stormwater runoff, decrease energy consumption, mitigate the heat island effect, enhance resilience to natural disasters, and improve human health and quality of life are just a few of the essential services trees provide to communities. Every year community trees and forests account for almost **20% of carbon sequestration** in US forests and provide **\$18.3 billion in cost savings** related to reductions in air pollution, energy use, and greenhouse gasses. Furthermore, the urban forestry sector directly contributes **\$35 billion annually to the US economy** in part by employing more than **500,000 people nationwide**.

Furthermore, strategic investments in urban and community forests and trees continue to drive job growth for skilled and entry-level positions across the sector and help to build tree equity for underserved neighborhoods so that all communities can benefit from healthy and robust tree canopy coverage.

USDA Forest Service: State, Private, and Tribal Forestry

Urban and Community Forestry Program (U&CF)

U&CF directly assists state government, nonprofit organizations, and partners that manage and steward our nation's urban and community forests. Working with the state forestry agencies, the program

provides technical, financial, research, and educational support and services to local government, nonprofit organizations, community groups, educational institutions, and tribal governments.

The federal support and leadership through the USDA Forest Service and overarching U&CF program leverage funds ranging from two to five times for each dollar invested in projects and grants. The federal “seed” money is often the key to implementing these programs at the state and local levels. Most smaller communities do not have the resources to practice urban tree management. The federal funds utilized by the states provide the resources to initiate their programs to manage trees for the optimal return on investment through tree benefits. These same funds set the bar for urban tree management in larger communities and at the state level, reducing redundancy and allowing consistency of care nationwide. The cumulative benefit to the country from each community achieves a national improvement to be recognized at the federal level.

Every year, U&CF serves nearly 7,500 communities and over 203 million people in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, US Territories, and affiliated Pacific Island Nations—helping to maintain and protect approximately 12 billion trees. U&CF is a high-impact program and a smart investment, as federal support is often leveraged 2:1 (or in many cases up to 5:1) by states and partner organizations. For example, the program documents well over a million volunteer hours each year. U&CF engages residents in cities and towns, brings together diverse partners with public and private resources, and demonstrates that federal investment can have huge and lasting impacts on communities of all sizes.

The \$1.5 billion investment through the Inflation Reduction Act is certainly beginning to make a huge impact across the country. However, during the submission process, the U&CF program received over 800 applications totaling more than \$6 billion in funding necessary to meet the needs of communities nationwide. **This gap in available funding versus demonstrated need highlights that the program is vitally important to communities and severely underfunded and over-prescribed.**

SUFC deeply appreciates appropriators’ strong support and understanding of the program’s diverse and unique benefits. Moving forward, current program funding is simply inadequate. We are especially concerned by the \$4 million decrease in FY 2024—from \$40 million to \$36 million.

The undersigned are committed to the success and growth of this program in FY 2025 and beyond. For context, we would like to highlight the National Urban and Community Forestry Advisory Council’s Ten-Year Urban Forestry Action Plan, which estimated annual funding needs in the range of approximately \$85 million for urban and community forestry activities across the Forest Service, including the U&CF program, Cooperative Lands Forest Health, Forest Inventory and Analysis, and Forest and Rangeland Research. Adjusted for inflation, that represents roughly \$110 million just to maintain current service levels and manage increasing urbanization.

Given the demonstrated, growing need for expanded service and support in communities of all sizes across the country, these estimates are now inadequate. We urge you to consider these factors when contemplating future funding needs.

USDA Forest Service: Forest and Rangeland Research

Urban and Community Forestry Research

There is also an urgent need for research funding to establish benchmarks that can be used to scientifically measure the impacts of these investments, including urban heat reduction, public health,

climate resilience, and mitigation of environmental injustices. Urban forestry research funding sources are currently limited, resulting in research that is too often stuck in a permanent “pilot study” mode. Dedicated research investment is therefore needed to build evidence and develop strategies to boost the effectiveness of urban and community forest investment and maximize benefits to residents.

The undersigned urges increasing annual appropriations to the Forest and Rangeland Research program to expand urban and community forest research specifically.

Supporting Organizations

National Organizations (15):

American Forests

Arbor Day Foundation

Center for Invasive Species

Corazon Latino

Green Infrastructure Center Inc.

International Society of Arboriculture

Natural Areas Conservancy

National Association of State Foresters

National Wildlife Federation

Outdoor Power Equipment Institute

Society of American Foresters

The Nature Conservancy

Tree Care Industry Association

Urban and Community Forestry Society

Student Conservation Association

State, Regional, Local Organizations & Companies (16):

Baton Rouge Botanical Garden Foundation, Baton Rouge LA

California ReLeaf

Capital Nature

Casey Trees

EcoLearning Together

The Davey Tree Expert Company

Forest ReLeaf of Missouri

Minnesota Shade Tree Advisory Council (MNSTAC)

Rensselaer Urban Forestry Council

Sustaining Our Urban Landscape

Trees Atlanta, Inc.

Tree Davis

Trees Forever

Trees for Honolulu's Future

TreePeople

Village of Franklin Park