TREE CANOPY AND FOREST ACTION PLAN

For CEEPC Acceptance

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Metropolitan Washington
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Agenda Item 5

Tree Canopy Action Plan Overview

- COG's April 2024 Resolution set a goal of at least 50% tree canopy across the region by 2050.
- Tree canopy has been decreasing due to compounding factors including:
  - Development
  - By-right private property tree removals
  - Climate change including intense storms and drought
  - Pests, diseases, invasive plants
  - Insufficient replacement of aging canopy



Photo: Vincent Verweij, Arlington Co.

Purpose of Action Plan

- Reaffirms significance of urban trees and forests.
- Guides COG's 24 local governments in setting and tracking their own canopy targets.
- Provides strategies to protect and expand canopy and build local government capacity.
- Supports regional coordination and implementation to protect and expand canopy.



Mount Eagle Elementary School Arbor Day Celebration, April 2025



Photos: Brian Keightley, Fairfax County

Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments

Action Plan Goal 1

Goal 1: Protect, maintain, and expand healthy, resilient, and accessible tree canopy and forests

Objective 1. Improve tree access for all

- Strategy 1. Make data-informed decisions
- Strategy 2. Prioritize tree planting in low canopy areas; align with community values

Objective 2. Enhance the quality of trees and forests

- Strategy 3. Manage Invasive Plant Species
- Strategy 4. Defend Against Pests and Diseases
- Strategy 5. Boost Seed Collection and Tree Supply

Objective 3. Protect the extent of the region's tree canopy

- Strategy 6. Develop and Enforce Protective Development Ordinances
- Strategy 7. Maintain trees and forests for resilience

Action Plan Goal 2

Goal 2: Build local and regional capacity to implement effective urban and community forestry programs.

Objective 1. Foster a skilled regional arboriculture and forestry workforce

- Strategy 8. Expand Workforce through Education, Training, and Professional Development

Objective 2: Build and sustain robust and adaptable budgets to support urban forestry programs

- Strategy 9. Align budgets with programs and plans to adequately manage urban and community forests

Objective 3: Maximize Partnerships:

- Strategy 10. Leverage partnerships to enhance community engagement, advocacy, policy development, pursuit of funding opportunities, tree conservation and planting, and data sharing.

Strategy 1: Make Data-Informed Decisions

- COG: Will report tree canopy cover every 5 years to track progress and trends.
- Members: Encouraged to set numeric canopy goals, consistently track change, and inventory tree and forest assets.

Strategy 2: Prioritize Tree Planting in Low Canopy Areas and Align Efforts with Community Values

- Details how to prioritize tree planting based on analysis of existing tree canopy cover and access.

- The following actions can increase tree access:
  - Use American Forests Tree Equity tool, or similar tool.
  - Build partnerships in low-canopy areas.
  - **Develop policies and budgets supportive of tree access for all.**
  - Provide technical assistance and job training in tree care.
  - **Coordinate urban forestry with other departments** (e.g., transportation, stormwater, and public health).

Strategy 3: Manage Invasive Plant Species

- Control invasive plants by ending their sale, educating communities, and supporting early detection and documentation.

- Local Recommendations:
  - **Legislate** discontinuing the sale of invasive plants and enforcement.
  - Community education programs
  - Early detection (e.g., PRISM), and rapid treatment.

Strategy 4: Defend Against Pests and Diseases

- Protect trees from pests and diseases through early detection, education, and regional coordination.

- Local Recommendations
  - Integrated Pest Management (IPM)
  - Early Detection and Rapid Response
  - Avoid Improper Maintenance to control the spread of pests and diseases.
  - Reduce/expedite process for removal of diseased trees to reduce the spread of disease and physical damage.
  - Encourage planting of disease-resistant tree species and diversify species.
  - Implement Deer Management

Strategy 5: Boost Seed Collection and Tree Supply

- Expand seed collection programs to support local nurseries and strengthen tree stock demand in supply chains.

- Local Successes and Recommendations
  - Promote sustainable seed collection that protects native ecosystems.
  - Support community seed collection campaigns and events.
  - Target developed areas with limited natural regeneration.
  - Build partnerships to collect seeds, grow trees, and expand planting.
  - Coordinate with nurseries on future tree needs.
  - Manage pests and deer impacts on seed supply and regeneration.

Strategy 6: Develop and Enforce Protective Development Ordinances

- Strengthen tree protection throughout the development process.

- Recommendations:
  - Align development review with comprehensive plan goals.
  - Require Tree Protection Plans early in design.
  - Tie permits to tree survival.
  - Integrate tree protection across regulations and agency reviews.
  - Complete environmental review before final site design.
  - Fund conservation of priority forest areas.

Strategy 7: Maintain Trees & Forests for Climate Resilience

- Routine maintenance can protect communities from storm damage.
- Having plans in place will assist with pre-storm coordination and efficient post-storm recovery.

- Recommendations
  - Private Property
    - Educate residents on tree health, storm resilience, and proper maintenance
    - Maintain a list of trusted tree care providers that follow accepted planting, pruning, and maintenance standards.
    - Promote the use of certified arborists and provide guidance on verifying credentials.
    - Insurance companies
  - Public Property
    - Implement proactive tree management.
    - Establish maintenance standards.
    - Prepare for storms and emergencies.
    - Plant and maintain trees and forests for long-term climate resilience.

Strategy 8: Expand Workforce Capacity Through Education, Training, and Professional Development

- Addressing workforce shortages requires education and training **pathways from K–12 through professional development**

- Recommended Local Actions:
  - Build the Future Workforce
    - Increase awareness of forestry and arboriculture careers by creating pathways for students and young adults to gain exposure, experience, and training.
  - Strengthen the Existing Workforce
    - Support current and future employees through professional development, certifications, and strategic workforce planning.

Strategy 9: Align Budgets with Programs and Plans to Adequately Manage Urban and Community Forests

- Have stable and diversified Forestry Program funding.

- Recommended Local Actions:
  - Align funding with program priorities.
  - Diversify funding sources
  - **Coordinate across departments.**
  - Maintain partnerships with non-governmental and volunteer organizations.
  - **Use data to document needs and demonstrate results.**

Strategy 10: Leverage Partnerships to Achieve Canopy Goals

- **Leverage partnerships** to enhance community engagement, advocacy, policy development, pursuit of funding opportunities, and data sharing.

- Methods to establish partnerships may include:
    - Attend community organization meetings, networking opportunities, and other local events.
    - Share your program details and welcome feedback.
    - Identify shared goals, needs, and capacities.
    - Communicate with other jurisdictions, to learn about their programs, approaches, and seek opportunities for collaboration.

Roles Implementing the Action Plan

- Local Government
  - Proactive Interagency Coordination
  - Effective Communication
- COG
  - Continue convening the Regional Tree Canopy Subcommittee (RTCS).
  - Share Action Plan, best practices, research, and funding opportunities.
  - Track regional and local canopy trends every five years using Chesapeake Bay Program data. Further analysis of drivers of canopy loss and trends by land ownership (public versus private) would be valuable.
  - Monitor indicators of forestry program progress.
  - Facilitate workshops and peer learning opportunities.
  - Support member outreach and messaging efforts.

Implementing the Action Plan



Photo: Prince George's County

Near term

- Continue to convene the RTCS
- Pursue grant funding
- Expand partnerships

Future areas:

- Provide peer technical support to COG's smaller or understaffed members
- Foster more interaction with regional partners
- Host regional workshops
- Manage cooperative purchasing contracts
- Workforce development

Acceptance of this Action Plan



Photo: COG/Regional Tree Canopy Subcommittee tour of Casey Trees Farm

- CEEPC members:
  - Any questions or comments.
  - Requested Action: Accept this Action Plan for online publication and implementation.

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