

FINAL REPORT
FOREST SERVICE GRANT NO. 94-G-142

Issued to: University of Illinois, Human-Environment Research Laboratory

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Project Name: Coping with Poverty: The Value of Nature in Urban Public Housing

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Grant Modifications: N/A

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Funding: Federal Share: \$180,000 plus **Grantee Share:** \$195,534 = **Total Project: \$375,534**

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Project abstract (as defined by initial proposal and contract):

Cities are characterized by a host of social ills — from anonymity, to incivility, to outright violence — that are strikingly less prevalent in rural areas. Why is this? Some have suggested that the physical environment in cities, crowding, noise, lack of nature may contribute to these social ills. In this study, we ask: can part of the unsociableness of city dwellers be traced to the lack of trees in their everyday surroundings? We set out to answer these question in one of the grimmest of urban settings — the Chicago Housing Authority's Robert Taylor Homes.

The number of trees immediately outside each of the 28 buildings at Robert Taylor Homes vary considerably. Some of the buildings are surrounded by only concrete and asphalt, while others have trees, grass, and even flowers. Using aerial photographs and on-site analyses, we chose 10 buildings with trees and eight buildings without trees. We then conducted in-depth interviews with women living in those buildings about their social behavior, and compared the answers from women living in different buildings. We also observed and compared resident's outdoor activities in areas at Robert Taylor Homes where there were trees, and where there we no trees.

Do people who live in, or nearby, the urban forest get along, and treat each other better, than people who have very little contact with the urban forest? This study, which show they do, provides considerable support for urban forest programs.

Project objectives:

There were two primary objectives:

1. Document the social benefits of urban forestry by measuring the effect of urban forests on:
 - levels of family violence
 - a woman's ability to cope with poverty
 - strength of community, and relations among neighbors
2. Disseminate the results of this work to policy-makers, practitioners, scientists, and the general public.

Objectives met successfully:

Both objectives have been met successfully. We found that, compared to people who live with very few nearby trees, people who live in or nearby the urban forest experience:

- less family violence
- greater persistence and more proactive behavior in their struggles against poverty
- stronger ties to their neighbors

We have communicated the results of this work to policy-makers, practitioners, scientists, and the general public through 38 presentations and 28 published articles and abstracts.

Objectives not met:

None

How did the project increase the knowledge we have about urban forestry? How did (will) the public benefit?

This work has produced a major break-through in our knowledge concerning the social benefits of urban forestry. We now have evidence that urban forests contribute to the solution to some of our most pressing urban problems—violence in the home, the despair that comes with intense poverty, and the disintegration of community.

At a time when the nation's attention is focused on issues such as crime prevention, health care, and the plight of single mothers, these findings suggest that urban forests are a basic part of any environment fit for humans; as necessary as streets, sewers, and electricity.

What specific quantifiable results were produced? (Please be specific - copies of reports and/or publications can be attached to this report.)

To date, this work has resulted in 28 published articles and abstracts.

Six articles have been produced that are directed to policy-makers and the general public. These articles have appeared in the *New Jersey Sentinel*, the *Providence Journal - Bulletin*, *Illinois Research*, *New Age Journal*, in a video news release to University of Illinois syndicated television news stations, and in the video program *Then, Now, and Tomorrow*, produced by the University of Illinois.

We have also written six articles for practitioners. These articles have appeared in *Arbor News*, *The American Nurseryman*, *Resources*, *Arbor Age*, *Plant People News*, and in *Arbor Day*.

Finally, we have written three full-length journal articles and 11 abstracts for scientific audiences. The journal articles will appear in *Environment and Behavior*; the abstracts were published by the Environmental Design Research Association, and by the International Symposium on Society and Resource Management.

How were results disseminated to the public?

We have described this work in 38 public presentations. A number of these presentations grew from special invitations we received after the initial results became known (e.g., a keynote address at an urban forestry conference, invited presentations at national conferences). Some of the presentations were to members of the general public (Agriculture alumni at the University of Illinois, high school students and their parents), others were to practitioners (e.g., American Community Gardening Association, Society of American Foresters, Society for Community Research and Action). We have also addressed academic audiences (a presentation at the national conference of students in Landscape Architecture, seminars at the University of Illinois and the University of Michigan).

If a no-cost time extension was granted for this project, why was it needed?

We did not have an extension.

List the active partners (key individuals or organizations) involved in the project:

Chicago Housing Authority, Resident Organizations (Director, Dr. Carol Adams)

How would you evaluate the grant process? What changes, if any, would you recommend?

Insightful and effective!

Comments considered of importance but not covered above:

NUCFAC provides support for a critical, but underfunded area of research — understanding the social benefits of urban forestry. The major break-through that we were able to make in this work could not have happened without the support of NUCFAC. We acknowledge and appreciate their support.

This report was prepared by:

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