



U R B A N A N D C O M M U N I T Y F O R E S T R Y

Alabama's Five-Year Strategic Plan

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Making Our Cities Better for People Through Trees

A good plan is like a road map. It shows the final destination and is usually the best way to get there (H. Stanley Judd).

Introduction

In 1994, Alabama produced a Five-Year Urban Forestry Assessment and Strategic Plan.¹ This landmark document represented the first attempt to create a statewide urban and community forestry program focus. While the plan was initially done to satisfy a USDA Forest Service (FS) requirement to receive federal funds, it set the tone for a statewide vision that continues today.

Accomplishments from this original plan included the creation of a state urban forestry partnership (Issue 1),⁷ the growth of Auburn University's role in urban forestry research, teaching, and extension (Issue 4), an increase in the quality of the arboricultural profession (Issue 5), the growth in private sector opportunities (Issue 6), increased support for Alabama Urban Forestry Association (AUFA) capacity building (Issue 7), and the increase in city foresters and related municipal professionals (Issue 8).

In 1999, steps were made to revise the state's strategic plan in accordance with FS funding assistance requirements. The lengthy process has been inclusive, and the results set a clear vision for the progress the state wants its urban and community forestry program to have made by 2005. The Alabama Urban Forestry Partnership developed the plan with input from a variety of other groups and stakeholders. Under the leadership of the AUFA, Dale Brown & Associates facilitated a planning session in Sterrett, Alabama.² Participants represented city foresters, government officials, private sector professionals, university officials, and interested citizens. The Urban Forestry Partnership's Executive Committee assigned its Technical Committee the task of using the Sterrett report as a working document to develop strategic goals and implementation action statements.

The Urban Forestry Partnership appreciates all who provided input into the planning process and is pleased to present this strategic plan to all who care about our urban forests. The Urban Forestry Partnership invites all who use the plan to work with them in implementing its goals.

Plan Overview

Purpose

This Urban and Community Forestry (U&CF) Five-Year Strategic Plan is Alabama's urban forestry game plan. Goals have been set to ensure program focus. Measurable objectives are in place to increase accomplishments. Leadership responsibilities are assigned to foster greater coordination and facilitation. And finally, realistic deadlines are included to encourage individual and group effort.

Scope of Urban Forestry

Urban forests are a way of life in Alabama, but are often taken for granted. However, urban and community forestry programs impact each citizen. When urban forests are retained or planted, they become the key natural element that can unify the urban infrastructure. Trees are the backbone of the urban forest. They make communities more livable for people. The more people work to improve the urban forest, the better our cities will be.

A healthy urban forest is an ecosystem in its own right. It is a living and dynamic physical environment, integrated with and inseparable from the structural environment. From the city center, the urban forest extends to the outer reaches of the suburbs and well beyond the line, which blurs the distinction between urban and rural land uses. The stewardship of this urban ecosystem is the domain of urban and community forestry. Urban and community forestry is concerned with the health of individual trees, as well as the productivity of the total urban forest. It also addresses the integrity of the urban forest environment in combination with human prosperity. Like a well-managed rural forest, a healthy urban forest must be tended as a multifaceted natural resource to meet the needs of a diverse people.

Plan Content

The U&CF strategic plan provides a general overview of urban forestry in Alabama. It acknowledges the past, recognizes the present, and looks toward the future. The strategic plan is formatted to allow an understanding of the key issues and the general strategy to accomplish each one. Specific activity details are deliberately omitted to encourage the lead agency to seek greater input and perspective from others.

Plan Implementation

The U&CF Strategic Plan becomes effective when published. Copies will be made available to any person or organization involved with urban and community forestry, such as tree boards, local governments, nonprofit organizations, educational institutions, corporations, volunteer groups, and private citizens. It is meant to be a resource and a catalyst for local, regional, and statewide action. Individuals and organizations will find the document useful in context with their own program needs.

In addition, the document is the Alabama Urban Forestry Partnership's primary guide and tool for its own activities. It will be used to guide the Partnership's statewide agenda. The U&CF Plan will also set priorities for the U&CF Financial Assistance Program. Where possible and practical, U&CF funds will be directed to those activities supported by the strategic plan.

Plan Monitoring and Maintenance

The Alabama Urban Forestry Partnership is responsible for monitoring the Strategic Plan and related activities. The Partnership's Technical Committee will carry out this responsibility with oversight from the Executive Committee. The Technical Committee will assess the plan and its accomplishments on an annual basis and report to the Executive Committee. Revisions and updates will be made as needed through this format.

Urban Forestry Yesterday

Trees are important in Alabama, and their histories can be told in the countless number of personal stories and actions of its early inhabitants. Many of these stories tell of people who planted or saved trees to protect their homes and communities from the elements, to provide life-giving products, or to demonstrate personal values and beliefs. Sometimes trees were used simply to serve as a living link to past memories and lost dreams. From the earliest inhabitants to the most recent generation, whether Native Americans or early pioneers and immigrants, trees were a way to make life better and more meaningful.

Prehistoric inhabitants of what is now Alabama practiced agriculture long before the arrival of the Europeans. No doubt, their use of fire and tree planting had a strong effect on the distribution of tree species. By the 1800s, Europeans began arriving in force. For many generations, these and other inhabitants actively did what they could to bring trees to their cities, towns, and communities. Tree planting was the most common "community forestry" activity. The British planted live oaks along the streets of Mobile as early as 1763. One can imagine the function and value of this tree species to those living in the Gulf Coast climate. It was not unusual for communities to experiment with tree species. In the early 1800s, mulberry trees were planted along the streets of Cahaba, our state's first capital city. Evidence exists of experiments with other tree species, as well.

Sometimes people planted trees to advance a belief or purpose. One of the best examples occurred on the grounds of Tuscaloosa's Bryce Hospital during the mid-1800s. The wife of the facility's administrator believed trees and a parklike setting could be a positive form of mental therapy for the patients. Numerous exotic and native trees were planted, and the facility's landscape became part of the patients' mental treatment.

Around the turn of the century, industrial development in Alabama and the accompanying migration of people from other states accelerated the interest and sophistication of urban tree planting. Many brought with them the concept of tree-lined avenues throughout neighborhoods and along commercial districts. The remnants of these plantings can still be seen throughout the state. Urban tree planning emerged as an important element about this same time. One of the best examples occurred in Fairfield, one of Alabama's first planned cities, where the original city plan called for the planting of thousands of trees.

For at least the first part of the 1900s, urban tree planting remained the status quo across the state. Alabama began to lag behind other parts of the country that were experimenting with organized tree programs. In fairness, Alabama has a much better climate for urban tree diversity, which buffered it against the insect and disease pests that devastated large portions of Northern and Eastern urban forests.

The last half of the 1900s witnessed events that would move the state's urban and community forestry program to a higher level. Much of this was due to Alabama's transition from a rural to urban state, where the majority of all Alabama's citizens would live in urban areas. As the state became more urban, quality-of-life issues, including city trees, became even more important to people. Elected officials recognized this and began supporting greater municipal activity concerning community trees.

Silverhill passed the first recorded tree ordinance in 1935, which defined the pruning zone around its street trees. In 1961, the state's first tree commission was formed in Mobile. The Mobile Tree Commission holds the distinction of being the only one enacted by a state legislative act. Authority was given the city to protect live oaks in specific areas. Not until 19 years later would there be a second tree commission in Alabama, this time in Foley through a local municipal ordinance. This unleashed a trend in the 1980s and 1990s that spread tree boards and ordinances across the state.

The concept of urban forestry was introduced nationally in the 1960s. Urban and community forestry was now defined as managing the urban forest as a system, not as individual trees. It borrowed elements from traditional forest management, including administration, policy, finance, planning, planting, maintenance, assessments, education, and removal. Through FS leadership (and funding), state forestry agencies began developing programs in the 1970s that provided urban forestry technical assistance to individuals and communities. The AFC fulfilled that role in Alabama beginning in the late 1970s. During that period, the emphasis was to help Alabama towns and cities organize local municipal tree programs. Tree City USA recognition became the main tool used by the AFC. One positive result of these efforts was an increase in the number of city foresters and other municipal professionals. In 1985, Mobile and Huntsville became the first Alabama cities to hire city foresters.

The emergence of other organizations began to expand the program beyond just the AFC. In 1990, the AUFA legally organized as a nonprofit organization. Alabama now had an organized structure for representative involvement in the state's urban and community forestry program. In 1992, Auburn University began offering an urban forestry emphasis to graduate degrees in forestry and horticulture. Several students have used this opportunity to pursue graduate training in the area of urban and community forestry.

In 1999, the AFC voluntarily shifted its lead urban and community forestry role to Auburn University through the Alabama Cooperative Extension System (ACES). A statewide partnership was formed to better coordinate services and resources with other organizations and to support ACES statewide program delivery. Principal partners include ACES, AFC, AUFA, Auburn University's School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences (AU-SFWS), and the FS.

Urban Forestry Today

Today, Alabama's urban forests are a mosaic of individual trees planted and maintained among portions of the original natural forest. Rapid urban growth has increased the urban forest acreage to the highest level ever. The latest survey indicates that most trees in Alabama's cities are native species. The majority are remnants of the natural forest and their "volunteer" progeny. Oak, pine, and dogwood are still the most prevalent native species in Alabama's cities and towns. Program elements reflect all levels of maturity and sophistication. Local community tree programs exist in almost every corner of the state. Many local governments recognize the value of the urban forest to quality of life. Citizens are more organized and actively involved. Businesses are providing more financial and logistical support. Educational institutions are supplying greater training and information. The private sector is making money in urban and community forestry. Urban and community forestry practitioners are using the latest technology.

2000 Facts and Figures

Alabama has 205,847,000 urban trees.³

There are 69 urban trees for each Alabama resident.³

Alabama's urban areas have 48.2 percent urban tree cover.³

Alabama's urban forests comprise 6.3 percent of the state.³

Nineteen cities and towns have at least one urban forester or city horticulturist on staff.⁵

Ninety-five cities and towns are Tree City USA-certified.⁶

Eleven cities are Tree City USA Growth Award-certified.⁶

Two utility companies are Tree Line USA-certified.⁶

One hundred and thirty-one people are International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) members.⁴

One hundred and twelve people are ISA-certified arborists.⁴

Urban Forestry Tomorrow

The future of urban and community forestry in Alabama is filled with enormous opportunities and potential:

- To quantify and measure the nature and extent of all urban forestry elements
- To enhance and foster locally directed and driven urban forestry efforts
- To positively affect and involve all people of Alabama

- To develop and achieve an effective system and network where information is exchanged among all those involved with or affected by the state's urban and community forestry program
 - To manage and utilize funds and resources for both goods and services in a prudent and thrifty manner
 - To use innovation and entrepreneurial efforts that lead to positive synergy
- The focus and strategies listed above offer a realistic means of achieving success.

Vision

Vision describes the organizational format and its potential impact in the future. A vision is guided by dreams, not constraints. It is what is hoped will happen if its dreams are realized. Vision inspires. It gives direction. It is the force that rallies others to join the cause and become involved. The vision for Alabama's Urban and Community Forestry Program is this:

An Alabama Urban Forestry Partnership that effectively enables an informed citizenry to make responsible decisions to sustainably manage Alabama's urban and community forests for diverse benefits.

Mission

A mission is both a philosophical expression of the values-based urban forestry need and a brief summary of what needs to be done to meet that need. The central mission of Alabama's Urban and Community Forestry Program is this:

The urban forestry program will provide leadership to focus and coordinate urban forestry so as to improve both the quality of Alabama's urban forest resource and the quality of life of all citizens.

Strategic Issues, Goals and Objectives

Strategic Issue 1: CAPACITY BUILDING

Goal 1: Increase participation in and build capacity for Alabama's urban and community forestry programs.

Objective 1: Increase the number of municipal urban forestry positions by 20%.

[Alabama Cooperative Extension System (ACES); 2005]

Objective 2: Certify 25 Extension Agriculture and Natural Resources agents by the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA).

[ACES; 2004]

Objective 3: Establish two additional urban forestry positions at Extension urban centers (from

nonurban and community forestry funding sources).

[ACES; 2005]

Objective 4: Increase the number of ISA-certified arborists by 50%.

[Alabama Urban Forestry Association (AUFA); 2005]

Objective 5: Graduate 100 people from the Tree Board Academy.

[AUFA/ACES; 2005]

Objective 6: Support 100 percent placement of Auburn University School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences (AU-SFWS) urban forestry graduates in related career fields.

[Partnership; 2005]

Objective 7: Increase the number of nonprofessional volunteers in community and urban forestry.

[AUFA; 2005]

Goal 2: Increase funding for Alabama urban and community forestry.

Objective 1: Support AUFA attainment of financial self-sufficiency through private investment and other sources of funding.

[Partnership; 2005]

Objective 2: Support the attainment of financial self-sufficiency for the AU-SFWS intern program through private investment and other sources of funding.

[Partnership; 2005]

Goal 3: Improve planning and coordination for Alabama urban forestry.

Objective 1: Establish an urban and community forestry clearinghouse of information to enhance communication and coordination among urban forestry partners.

[AUFA/ACES; 2003]

Objective 2: Provide a list of state and county contacts and informational resources to every applicant for community and urban forestry financial assistance; visit or contact every recipient of financial assistance.

[ACES; 2001]

Goal 4: Provide greater access to urban and community forestry for underserved and disenfranchised communities and citizens.

Objective 1: Develop a model program to engage underserved communities.

[ACES; 2003]

Goal 5: Increase political support for urban and community forestry programs in Alabama.

Objective 1: Provide copies of the Partnership annual report to appropriate federal, state, and local elected officials.

[Partnership; 2002]

Objective 2: Notify elected officials of urban and community forestry activities in their jurisdiction, and involve them when possible.

[Partnership; 2002]

Goal 6: Develop innovative urban and community tree programs and projects.

Objective 1: Develop a rapid-response technical team process to assist communities with local urban forestry issues on a strategic basis.

[ACES; 2003]

Objective 2: Create a prioritized list of research needs for urban and community forestry.

[AU-SFWS; 2005]

Objective 3: Develop on-site demonstration projects to serve as models for promoting urban forestry (with urban and community forestry funding and other available funding sources).

[ACES/AU-SFWS; 2004]

Strategic Issue 2: ASSESSMENT

Goal 1: Assess the condition of Alabama's urban and community forests.

Objective 1: Develop a plan to collect and interpret baseline data on 100 percent of Alabama's urban forests.

[Alabama Forestry Commission; 2003]

Objective 2: Research and develop urban forest models that identify forest impacts on cities.

[Alabama Forestry Commission; 2003]

Objective 3: Develop guidelines that assist local community tree programs in assessing and monitoring their urban forests.

[ACES; 2003]

Goal 2: Develop standards and assess urban and community forestry programs.

Objective 1: Develop realistic and measurable standards for rating urban forestry programs in Alabama communities; recognize achievements.

[AUFA; 2002]

Objective 2: Revise and update the state arborist certification exam to reflect current knowledge and technology.

[ACES; 2003]

Objective 3: Develop a method for measuring the impact of the urban forestry program on the state's minority population.

[Alabama Forestry Commission; 2003]

Goal 3: Assess public attitudes, awareness, and educational needs.

Objective 1: Complete a statewide assessment of public attitudes, awareness, and educational needs.

[AU-SFWS/AUFA; 2003]

Strategic Issue 3: EDUCATION

Goal 1: Develop targeted urban forestry education and training programs for urban forestry practitioners and clients.

Objective 1: Determine the demand for the creation of an Auburn University continuing education program for urban forestry professionals.

[ACES/AU-SFWS; 2003]

Objective 2: Develop an urban forestry component in Alabama's Master Gardener Program.

[ACES/AU-SFWS; 2003]

Objective 3: Develop educational programs that target builders, developers, and regional planners with the ultimate goal of educating them on the importance of urban forests and how they can be profitable.

[AUFA; 2004]

Objective 4: Develop a plan for youth education in urban forestry.

[ACES; 2003]

Objective 5: Institutionalize an urban forestry distance-learning program for professionals and lay people at the county level.

[ACES; 2005]

Objective 6: Include Partnership events as allowable in-service training for Extension personnel (e.g., AUFA annual conference, Arbor Day Foundation seminars, etc).

[ACES; 2001]

Goal 2: Develop educational programs that increase public awareness of urban forestry.

Objective 1: Develop and implement an urban forestry marketing strategy.

[Partnership; 2003]

Objective 2: Assist Trees for Alabama and the Birmingham Botanical Library, and continue improving its Urban Forestry Resource Center as a model for other communities.

[Partnership; 2002]

Goal 3: Increase urban population's understanding and appreciation of forestry.

Objective 1: Develop model educational activity that can be used in other urban areas of the state.

[Alabama Forestry Commission; 2003]

Strategic Issue 4: RECOGNITION

Goal 1: Acknowledge and appreciate the achievements of persons, organizations, and communities that contribute to the state's quality of life through urban forestry.

Objective 1: Develop and implement activities to attain 150 Tree City USA certifications, 25 Tree City Growth Awards, and 5 Tree Line USA certifications.

[ACES; 2005]

Objective 2: Develop an annual awards program for all certified Tree City USA and Tree Line USA communities.

[AUFA; 2003]

Objective 3: Develop an annual publication by the Partnership that highlights accomplishments during the year.

[ACES; 2002]

Resources

Finding and getting help can make the difference between an urban and community forestry program that is a success and one that is not. The ultimate success of this plan depends on organizations and citizens being able to find the resources to help them get the job done. Fortunately, the task is easier as more support and help is becoming available in the state. This section lists some of the organizations and programs in Alabama that can supply help and assistance.

Organizations

Alabama Forestry Commission

This state agency was originally established in 1924. The mission of the Alabama Forestry Commission is to protect the forests from all harmful agents; to provide service to landowners, and help them carry out responsible forest management on their property to benefit themselves, their land, and society; and to educate the general public about the value of our forests in insuring both a healthy economy and environment. The agency has county, regional, and state offices.

Alabama Cooperative Extension System

The Alabama Cooperative Extension System operates as the primary outreach organization for the land-grant function of Alabama A&M University and Auburn University. The System identifies statewide educational needs, audiences, and optimal educational programs that are delivered through a network of public and private partners supported by county, state, and federal governments. The organization unifies the land-grant efforts to provide educational opportunities that

help people individually and collectively make sound decisions about their lives, businesses, and communities and develop economically, socially, and culturally.

Auburn University - School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences

Within Auburn University's overall mission as the state's land-grant university, the School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences' goal is to develop and maintain an outstanding faculty with the diverse backgrounds necessary to provide Auburn students and the citizens of Alabama with superior programs in forestry and wildlife education, research, and public service. With respect to undergraduate education, this means graduating individuals who have the skills necessary for initial employment as well as the breadth and depth of educational background to support career advancement and continuing professional growth.

Alabama Urban Forestry Association

This group was formed in 1989 as the state's organized representative body on urban forestry. As a nonprofit organization, the AUFA attracts a diverse membership base to help support and deliver program services and activities. Its purpose is to act as a forum, resource, catalyst, and liaison concerning urban forestry issues in the state. Other activities include being a clearinghouse for information and materials, encouraging educational programs and observances, and promoting discussion on urban forestry issues.

Local and State Governments

Local and state governments can be a county, municipality, city, town, township, local public authority, school district, intrastate district, council of government, or any other regional or interstate government entity, or any agency or instrumentality of local government. It is hard to imagine a successful urban and community forestry program that doesn't have the support of its local or state government. Local governments can provide the legal, financial, and organizational structure needed for the public welfare. It is the basis for success, and all effort should be made to strengthen this role and relationship.

Nonprofit Organizations

Nonprofit organizations exist at the local, regional, and state level. Nonprofits are potential partners for both the government and private sector. They provide opportunities for personal and institutional philanthropy and serve as a vital mechanism for collective action based on a specific focus or issue. Many nonprofit organizations have purposes that are consistent with urban and community forestry issues. They can be a resource to help

with education, recognition, advocacy, funding, and to provide a forum for community voices to be heard. Because of their special tax status, nonprofits can also serve as an incentive for funding urban and community forestry programs and projects.

Educational Institutions

Alabama has a large number of universities and colleges where the major functions are instruction, organized research, and sponsored activities. Individual institutions possess unique blends of staff, facilities, and innovation. They offer a great resource for urban and community forestry programs. Local urban and community forestry programs should tap into the educational institution's resources and expertise in a manner that is consistent with academic philosophies and institutional objectives.

Corporate Citizenship

The business arena can have a profound impact on an urban and community forestry program. In many communities, it represents a significant but often underutilized resource. Companies normally look to support causes that improve relations with employees, customers, investors, business partners, and governments, as well as the wider society and community. They make their choices based on the company's need for profit and on its corporate values. Types of corporate support include employee volunteer time, equipment, facilities, expertise, and cash contributions.

Private Sector Professional

In the wake of increasing public interest in urban forestry, private enterprise is an emerging resource that can provide technical services for the care of the urban forest. Many traditional foresters have crossed over to urban forestry. They typically offer assistance with urban forest assessments, management plans, training, and organizational structure. In addition, other related professions offer urban and community forestry related services. These include landscape architects, horticulturists, planners, engineers, and architects.

Community Volunteerism

One inherent feature of the urban forest is the presence of people. A contingent of volunteer caretakers is available to provide continuous observation and maintenance of the urban forest. Citizen participation may run the gamut from highly publicized fund-raising events to the simple act of planting a tree. Examples of citizen volunteers include individuals, civic groups, youth organizations, and churches.

Assistance Programs

Urban & Community Forestry Financial Assistance Program

Auburn University, through the Alabama Cooperative Extension System, administers this federal cost-share program. Matching funds are provided to local governments, nonprofit organizations, and educational institutions for projects that meet a primary urban and community forestry program need.

Tree City USA Program

The National Arbor Day Foundation in cooperation with the FS and the National Association of State Foresters sponsors this national recognition program. Communities must meet four standards to qualify for certification. These include a tree ordinance, a tree board or department responsible for the community tree program, a comprehensive tree program, and an Arbor Day observance.

Plant A Tree in Alabama Program

This program provides funds to eligible groups to plant trees in communities across the state. Organizations must have tax-exempt status under the Internal Revenue Service. Funding is provided by the Alabama Power Foundation with promotional and program support from the AUFA.

Regional Growing Center

The National Tree Trust, in partnership with the Calhoun County Extension System and the Alabama Department of Youth Services, established a facility in Anniston to grow tree seedlings in 2-gallon containers for out-planting on public lands. This program includes an educational component for schools using tree seeds, potting soil, and small containers.

Transportation Enhancement Program

This federal program is administered by the Alabama Department of Transportation. Local governments provide matching funds. The program funds sixteen eligible transportation enhancement activities. Landscaping and beautification are eligible activities.

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Much credit and appreciation go to the many people who took time from their busy schedules to meet and talk about the direction of Alabama's urban and community forestry program. Many gave at their own personal expense. These citizens represented all segments ranging from the professional to the layperson and from the largest city to the smallest town. The one quality each shared was a genuine interest in producing the best plan possible.

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¹ Alabama Urban Forestry Association. 1994. *Alabama's Urban Forestry Assessment and Strategic Plan*. Montgomery, AL: Classic Printing.

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⁷ Urban Forestry Partnership. 2001. *Memorandum of Understanding Between the Alabama Forestry Commission, Auburn University, Alabama Urban Forestry Association, and the USDA Forest Service*.



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For more information, call your county Extension office. Look in your telephone directory under your county's name to find the number.

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