Urban and Community Forestry Program

The purpose of the Urban and Community Forestry Program (U&CF) is to establish and maintain optimal urban and community forests to help improve the quality of life of Californians and the quality of urban natural resources.

To accomplish this, CAL FIRE's Regional Urban Foresters provide technical assistance, education, and policy advice to local governments, non-profits, private sector organizations, and the general public that help to advance Urban Forestry per the Urban Forestry Act of 1978 (PRC 4799.06 – 4799.12). The Urban Forestry Act was last updated in 2010.

The U&CF Program Regional Urban Foresters engage in statewide, regional, and local issues in regards to urban forestry. Some examples of this are:

- Speaking at workshops, conferences, and events.
- Writing articles and engaging the media when appropriate and requested.
- Providing technical and Best Management Practice information to local governments, non-profit organizations, and the general public.
- Engaging in helping local governments devise improved policies for urban forest management.
- Helping local practitioners and advocates connect and collaborate.
- Administering pass through grants to help accomplish these functions.

As outlined by the Urban Forestry Act of 1978, U&CF Program staff work to:

- Promote the use of urban forest resources for purposes of increasing mutually eneficial projects in communities.
- Arrest the decline of our urban forest resources, facilitate the planting of trees in urban communities, and improve the quality of the environment in urban areas through the establishment and improved management of urban forest resources.
- Facilitate the creation of permanent jobs in tree maintenance and related urban forestry activities in neighborhoods, local, and regional urban areas.
- Optimize the potential of tree and plant cover in reducing energy consumption and producing fuel and other products.
- Encourage the coordination of state and local agency activities in urban forestry and related programs and encourage maximum resident participation in their development and implantation.

The structure and delivery of the U&CF Program is built upon cooperative relationships with and technical assistance to local governments, non-profit organizations, and private companies. Partnerships include:

The Urban Forest Ecosystems Institute (UFEI), which was developed to address the increasing need for improved management of urban forests in California. The UFEI website houses SelecTree online tree selection software, UrbanWood online tree utilization marketplace, the California Register of Big Trees downloadable publications, current events, job listings, links to other related sites and much more.

The California ReLeaf organization (California Releaf), Maintains a network of over 90 local non-profit urban and community forestry organizations. They seek to empower grassroots efforts and build strategic partnerships that preserve, protect, and enhance California's urban and community forests.

The California Urban Forest Council (CaUFC), Composed of professionals associated with municipalities, the tree care industry, the nursery industry, community-based and public health organizations. The CaUFC support seven regional councils across California. They are dedicated to the expansion and perpetuation of sustainable urban and community forests to enhance the quality of life for all Californians.

The Western Chapter of the International Society of Arboriculture (WCISA), a member driven organization dedicated to fostering a greater appreciation for trees by promoting research and education to advance the professional practice of arboriculture.

As one mechanism for encouraging better Urban & Community Forestry management practices, the U&CF Program provides grants, when funding is available for the many economic, environmental, and social benefits that urban society gains from urban and community forests.

Grants

Local governments and non-profit organizations are eligible to apply for U&CF Grant programs. The U&CF Program encourages the best urban forest management practices. Grants are for activities including but not limited to: tree planting, comprehensive urban forest management plans, tree resource inventories, educational programs, green infrastructure, and innovative ideas that promote urban forestry in California. Grantees must expend the necessary money and do the work. They are then reimbursed as the work is completed satisfactorily. All grants are administered and inspected by the programs' Regional Urban Foresters.

Climate Change

The Urban Forestry Act is closely linked (PRC 4799.12) to the Global Warming Solutions Act. Urban forests store carbon as they grow and can help to mitigate the effects of climate change on the urban populations of California by moderating temperatures on hot days, i.e. reducing the urban heat island effect. Benefits are also realized through direct shading of buildings and other facilities by trees. You can find more information about CAL FIRE's climate change efforts at www.fire.ca.gov.

Urban Wood, Biomass Utilization and Carbon Sequestration

The Urban and Community Forestry Program embraces the concept of sustainability. A crucial part of this concept is economic viability. One way that urban forests can contribute is through utilization of wood fiber and biomass grown in urban areas. This is currently a resource that goes largely untapped in California. The U&CF Program purports that when a tree must be removed in a city, it should be used for its highest and best purpose. This is often high quality wood products. Additionally, the U&CF Program is keeping abreast of ways that urban biomass could be utilized to develop bio-fuels or to generate electricity. The U&CF Program hosts an UrbanWood website through the UFEI website at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo. Technical assistance is available through the program's Regional Urban Foresters.

The Urban & Community Forestry Program worked with other state agencies and researchers to develop a compliance offset protocol for Urban and Community Forestry in the emerging carbon credit trading market. These protocols have been officially adopted by the California Climate Action Registry and the California Air Resources Board.

Tree City USA, Tree City USA Growth Award, Sterling Growth Award, Tree Line USA and Tree Campus USA

The Tree City USA Award (TCUSA) program is organized by the National Arbor Day Foundation (NADF) on a nationwide basis. The U& CF Program delivers this program in California. This certification shows a baseline level of achievement. The TCUSA Growth Award shows that city's Urban and Community Forestry program is expanding and improving in a significant way. The TCUSA Sterling Growth Award is achieved by obtaining the TCUSA Growth Award for ten years.

Tree Line USA and Tree Campus USA are similar award programs for utilities and college campuses that show a baseline commitment to an Urban and Community Forestry program. More about programs can be learned at: http://www.arborday.org/.