

# FORESTS IN CITIES: COMMON METRICS FACT SHEET

## The Forests in Cities Network

The Natural Areas Conservancy’s [Forest in Cities Network](#) was created in 2019 to promote and advance healthy forested natural areas in cities across America through science, management, partnerships, and communications. It is composed of expert teams of forest practitioners and advocates from 12 metro regions across the United States. The key program goals for this network are to 1) Nurture and grow a national network of experts 2) Advance urban forest science and practice and 3) Advocate for increased resources and support.



*The twelve cities and metro areas in the Forests in Cities Network*

## Forested Natural Areas offer social and ecological benefits in cities:

Across our 12-city network, forested natural areas provide high-quality nature for urban residents. These green oases are biodiverse and valuable but are under threat. In our member cities:

- Across our 12 network cities there are over 270,000 acres of forests and open natural areas. This includes nearly 1,800 miles of trails, with an average of 223 miles per city.
- Urban forested natural areas provide habitat for flora and fauna and most of our network city forests support rare, threatened, or endangered plants, animals, and vegetation types. For example, the

## WHAT ARE FORESTED NATURAL AREAS?

Across the United States, there are over a million acres of forest embedded in urban landscapes. Unlike other parts of the urban forest, like street trees or trees found in landscaped parks, "forested natural areas" refers to a type of urban forest that looks and feels like the woods.



*Forest Park in St. Louis, MO*

**270,000**

ACRES OF FOREST AND OPEN NATURAL AREAS ACROSS THE 12-CITY NETWORK

American peregrine falcon, the swallow-tailed kite, and the pink lady's slipper.

- 63% of the forests in member cities are dominated by native species.
- Over 80% of forests in our network of the forests in our network have invasive species present.
- 80% have lost natural areas to development in the past 10 years.
- COVID-19 illuminated the importance of natural area parkland: 83% of our network cities reported an increase in visitation due to the pandemic.
- 90% of cities have efforts underway to address social equity through the care of natural areas.

### Forested natural areas play an important role in urban climate solutions.

- Climate change compounds other threats to forested natural areas. Changing temperatures, forest fires, and storm events of increasing severity and frequency put mounting pressure on the continually shrinking extent of urban forested natural areas
- Most (68%) US organizations that manage urban forests listed climate change stressors as an important ecological challenge.
- Forests play a key role in mitigating the impacts of climate change by absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, and storing it in their wood, leaves and soil.

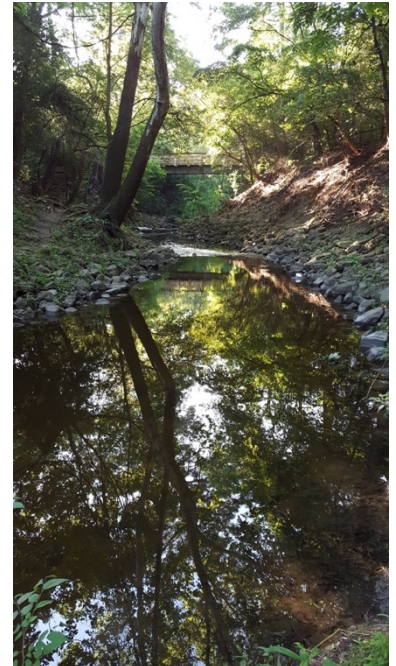
### Forested natural areas need care and investment.

Forests in urban areas are impacted by human use, fragmented, and exposed to invasive species. They require specialized management to thrive and provide benefits for city-dwellers. Municipalities and their partners are working hard to manage these precious forested spaces.

- Across our network cities, 58,043 acres were actively managed in fiscal year 2020 –21% of the publicly-owned forests across these cities.
- Common in-network management activities include tree planting, invasive species management, monitoring, and conservation activities.
- In 2020, member organizations and their partners planted 66,556 trees.
- In 2020, forested natural areas received 164,104 hours of volunteer care and management.
- 50% of cities have a green jobs program that works in natural areas
- These twelve cities spend an average of \$804 per acre of forested natural areas.

# 58,043

ACRES OF FOREST  
WERE MANAGED BY OUR  
NETWORK CITIES IN THE  
PAST YEAR



*Riparian forest in Houston (Justin Bower)*

## LEARN MORE:

Our network cities are leaders in their field, advancing management practices, testing new technologies and monitoring their work over time. You can find these case studies and advances in our [Online resource library](#) and special issue of the peer-reviewed journal [Cites and the Environment](#).

**More resources are needed to improve the care and protection of forested natural areas.**

- The government agencies and partners who care for these spaces are understaffed and under-resourced.
- On average, under 4% (range: 1%-15%) of municipal parks department budgets were devoted to natural area management, yet forested natural areas comprise the majority of parkland.
- 72% of organizations experienced a decreased ability to care for and manage urban natural areas due to budget and staff cuts during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- All the cities in our network say that increasing their staff and / or budget would improve the work they do.



*Seward Park, Seattle*

ON AVERAGE ONLY

**4%**

OF MUNICIPAL PARKS  
BUDGETS ARE DEVOTED  
TO NATURAL AREAS



*Upland hardwood forest in Tampa*