

Alabama's Urban Forests

***Making Alabama's communities better places
for people to live through the management
of our urban forests***

The *Alabama's Urban Forests* exhibit and this companion piece target those involved with either emergency management efforts or a community tree program. The purpose is to promote greater interaction and coordination between these two groups so that our urban forests produce maximum safety and benefits to all Alabama citizens.

Our Incredible Urban Forests

Alabama's urban forests are an astonishing resource. City trees work to give our state a healthier environment, stronger economy, and a more vibrant social fabric. For generations, Alabamians have planted trees in our cities. Trees brought them a sense of beauty, comfort, and relief. We continue to reap what our ancestors have literally sown. This tree ethic continues even today. Local governments and private citizens spend millions of dollars annually to make communities, neighborhoods, and homes greener and better places to live. The good news is that evidence shows these dollars are well spent. Through research and other studies, we are learning that city trees are more valuable than ever imagined.

Urban trees:

- Enhance retail business trade
- Reduce storm water runoff
- Attract tourism and development
- Increase property values
- Conserve energy costs
- Improve personal health and well-being
- Clean our air
- Build community pride
- Increase recreational activities
- Lower urban noise
- Improve citizenship

Storms Over Alabama

Natural disturbances and disasters, such as hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, ice storms, winter storms, thunderstorms, and wildfires occur almost everywhere in Alabama. When they do, they can alter the face of an entire city, town, neighborhood, or home. These natural events are probably as common as they were in the past. The big difference today is our state's urban growth. As people and cities build in areas outside traditional urban boundaries, they become more vulnerable to nature's wrath.

When storms do happen, city trees can become a problem. Storm damaged trees may topple over or break apart. Some can be damaged and then fail well after the storm has happened. No matter what our opinions are about trees, we learn that nature's destructive forces can overwhelm them. What might once have been a beautiful community asset may now become a hindrance and an added cost to the storm's original impact. The following lists specific ways storms can cause trees to be problems in our cities:

- Clog streets and access
- Disrupt utilities
- Interfere with city services
- Increase debris removal
- Damage public and private property
- Threaten lives, public health, and safety
- Increase recovery costs

The Solution

Local governments can do much more to prepare their city's trees for a natural disturbance. If your community doesn't have an organized tree program, then start one. Here are some key elements in building a community tree program in your town.

- Legally established municipal tree program
- Urban forester on staff or contract
- Tree ordinance

- Regular assessment and inspection of community trees
- Long-term tree maintenance program
- Regular removal of high-risk trees, limbs, branches, and stumps
- Utilization of urban wood waste
- Planting the right tree in the right place
- Tree care workshops, seminars, and certifications
- Public education
- Inclusion of urban forestry in storm mitigation planning

Making urban forestry a part of the local emergency management planning process will foster mitigation activities during the period between storms, when things are relatively calm. The best place to make this happen is through your community's Hazard Mitigation Planning Team. The Alabama Emergency Management Agency promotes the formation of these local teams across Alabama. They include people from key state agencies, units of government, and other public and private sector agencies. The goal of these teams is to reduce or eliminate future loss and damage due to natural hazards. Make sure that someone with urban forestry expertise or perspective is on your local Hazard Mitigation Planning team. Planning should detail what the community will do concerning its urban trees before, during, and after a storm

or natural disaster. It should also address who will be responsible for each tree-related activity. Finally, planning efforts should describe how urban tree-related activities would be coordinated with others.

Many communities hesitate when comparing the relative cost of a community tree program and limited municipal budgets. Actually, urban tree problems that are ignored over time and left to natural outcomes can be much more expensive. Organized tree programs that have a long-range, systematic approach to urban forest management produce trees that are more abundant, healthier, productive, and safer for people.

Other ACES Urban Forestry Publications

"Planning and Implementing an Urban Forestry Program" Extension Publication ANR-976

"Street Trees: Site Selection, Planting, and Maintenance in the Urban Landscape" Extension Publication ANR-814



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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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