

Commented [BT1]: New Template!

Tree Management Policy	Number: 5.6.1.2	
	Date: May 1, 2022	
	Supersedes: 5.6.1 (June 1, 2001)	
Approved:	Department: Parks & Recreation	Page 1 of 7

1.0 PREAMBLE

Seattle’s park and recreation system is made up of over 488 parks on 6,441 acres with an estimated 500,000 trees. Managed by Seattle Parks and Recreation (SPR), the system has over 4,000 acres of developed parkland and more than 2,700 acres of natural areas, both of which support Seattle’s urban forest. The urban forest includes not just trees, but also shrubs, understory plants, soil, insects, and wildlife. SPR’s Urban Forestry Team plants, maintains, and removes trees on SPR property.

2.0 PURPOSE

This policy supports SPR’s commitment to healthy people, a healthy environment, and strong communities. Seattle’s urban forest provides important ecological and public health benefits for Seattle’s growing population and this Tree Management Policy supports the City’s goals of increasing overall tree canopy, promoting tree health and longevity within parks, and ensuring trees on SPR parkland are managed in a manner consistent with other departments and with industry standards.

This Tree Management Policy will guide SPR’s decision-making process for the care of trees

3.0 CITY DEPARTMENTS AFFECTED

- Finance & Administrative Services
- Office of Sustainability & Environment
- Seattle Department of Construction and Inspection
- Seattle Department of Transportation
- Seattle City Light
- Seattle Public Utilities

Commented [BT2]: Removed: DON, Law, Executive Services.
Added: FAS, OSE, SDCI

4.0 REFERENCES

- Seattle Urban Forest Management Plan
- Executive Order: 03-05 Tree Replacement
- International Society of Arboricultural (ISA) Best Management Practices
- Seattle Municipal Code (SMC) 15.43 – Tree and Vegetation Management in Public Places
- SMC 25.09 – Regulations for Environmentally Critical Areas

Commented [BT3]: Updated EOs and SMCs, removed old memos and ordinances, added UFM Plan

- SMC 25.11 – Tree Protection
- SMC 18.30 – Enforcement Against Unauthorized Use of Park Property
- Tree Care Industry Association (TCIA) – American National Standards Institute (ANSI) A300
- TCIA – ANSI Z133.1 Safety Standards
- [TCIA – Standard Definitions for the Green Industry](#)
- [Executive Order 03-05: Two for One Tree Replacement](#)
- [SDCI Directors Rule 16-2008: Designation of Exceptional Trees](#)

5.0 **POLICY**

5.1 **Management Framework**

5.1.1 It is the policy of SPR that all decisions regarding tree management will be based on the following criteria:

- **Safety:** Seattle’s parks and facilities should be safe for the public to use.
- **Park Function:** A park or facility’s intended use should be maintained whenever possible.
- **Urban Forest Health:** The ecosystem services and human health benefits Seattle’s urban forest and the ecosystem benefits it provides, is critical to SPR’s mission.
- **Equitable Distribution of Services:** SPR acknowledges the importance of the City’s Race and Social Justice Initiative (RSJI) and is committed to achieving an equitable distribution of tree maintenance services and planting as one step toward eliminating racial disparities and achieving racial equity in Seattle.

5.1.2 **Environmentally Critical Areas** – SPR is allowed to remove and replace trees and vegetation in Environmentally Critical Areas (ECAs) per SMC 25.09.

5.1.3 **Park-Specific Plans** – Vegetation Management Plans and other park-specific plans must be consistent with the Seattle Municipal Code and this policy. Any exception needs approval by the Superintendent.

5.2 **Capital Projects**

Current and future risk to and from trees shall be considered when siting capital projects. To the extent feasible, capital projects will preserve and design around healthy trees, rare or unusual species, and trees with historical significance. Removal will be considered only when there are no acceptable alternatives to placement or renovation of facilities, equipment, and/or infrastructure. Any trees removed will be replaced on a 2:1 basis, per Executive Order 03-05.

An SPR certified arborist will be involved in all phases of tree management during planning, design, and construction of capital projects.

5.3 **Removal**

Tree removal must be approved by an SPR certified arborist. A tree assessment will be conducted prior to tree removal. All tree assessments will use an industry-standard assessment protocol and be performed by a qualified tree risk assessor. All assessments are valid for no more than one (1) year after date of inspection, and during normal weather conditions. Trees will not be removed for the benefit of private purposes including views, solar access, aesthetic preferences, or debris complaints. If a tree is removed on SPR property it will be replaced per Section 5.6.

Commented [BT4]: Existing criteria bulleted and described. Equitable distribution of services added. Prioritization within criteria removed.

Commented [BT5]: Section simplified. Reasons for not cutting trees for private benefit expanded.

5.4 Reasons for Removal

5.4.1 Risk – SPR will remove trees that pose an unacceptable risk to safety and cannot be mitigated through pruning, cabling, or other intervention methods. Risk will be determined by a qualified tree risk assessor.

5.4.2 Park Function – Trees that interfere with use or access to a park that cannot be mitigated through pruning or other methods may be removed. Examples of interference include, but are not limited to, blocking sightlines for safety, preventing use of playfields or playgrounds, and blocking or heaving sidewalks/paved paths. Trees are an essential element of park design and function and will be retained where possible.

5.4.3 Ecological Thinning – Ecological thinning and forest gap enhancement methods are approved tools for addressing stem density and single-species dominance in natural area parks being managed as part of SPR's Green Seattle Partnership.

5.4.4 Pest Outbreak/Disease – Tree removal to contain an outbreak will only be considered as a last resort in the face of a serious threat to forest health determined by the SPR Arborist.

5.4.4 Weed Species – Tree species identified as noxious weeds by King County Noxious Weeds or as naturalizing species impacting forest health by Green Seattle Partnership may be considered for herbicide treatment or removal to support forest restoration goals. These species are identified in the Green Seattle Partnership Work Specifications and are updated annually.

5.4.5 View Management – SPR identifies certain parks for views and manages them through the Viewpoint Designations Policy (60-P 2.17). Tree and vegetation management performed in an Environmentally Critical Area to preserve view corridors must be in line with SMC 25.09. Tree removal or pruning for designated viewpoints will be conducted if and only when it is safe and does not put people or property in jeopardy.

5.5 Pruning

All SPR pruning operations, including root pruning, will follow ANSI A300 standards. Trees will not be pruned for private views, aesthetic preferences, or debris complaints. Tree topping is not permitted.

5.6 Planting

All operations will follow ANSI A300 standards for tree planting practices. SPR staff will choose species that maximize future ecological benefits, with an emphasis on planting trees that are large at maturity, evergreen, resilient to climate change, and adapted to local site conditions. Species will also be selected that align with existing historic designations, design, or other plans for specific parks. In developed parks, deciduous trees will be placed, to the extent possible, in groves to allow for retention of leaf litter. To ensure proper establishment care, newly planted trees will receive supplemental watering until established, climate resiliency considerations, and individual tree needs will be considered to determine the duration of establishment watering.

5.7 Integrated Pest Management

Certain tree diseases will be treated as resources allow following SPR's Integrated Pest Management plan. The threat to, and overall health of, the urban forest will be weighed against the drawbacks of

Commented [BT6]: Merged/replaced: hazard and dead trees to Risk, Visibility to Viewpoint Management, Impediments to Park Function, Thinning to Ecological Thinning.

Commented [BT7]: Generally simplified. Additions for climate resiliency, litter retention, and tree care.

using chemical treatment. Current examples include treating elm trees with systemic fungicide to protect from Dutch elm disease, using pneumatic tools and mulch to mitigate soil compaction.

Commented [BT8]: New section consolidates practices into policy language.

5.8 Tree Protection

Commented [BT9]: Sections related to tree protection consolidated.
New section on maintenance practices added.

5.8.1 Construction – Trees at risk of damage will be protected during construction activities. All tree protection must follow industry standards outlined in ANSI A300 and SMC 25.11.

5.8.2 Vandalism and Illegal Cutting – Whenever possible, action will be taken to investigate and prosecute vandalism and illegal cutting of city-owned trees. Section 18.12.070 of the Park Codes makes it illegal for anyone to vandalize or remove vegetation in a park. Compensation for damages will be sought based on the appraised value in accordance with the current version of the ISA Guide for Plant Appraisal, cost of replacement plantings, and subsequent maintenance. In addition, SPR may work with SDCI to enforce Chapter 25.11 as an alternative to or in addition to pursuing an action under 18.12.070.C.

5.8.3 Rare Specimens – Individual trees that are considered rare or exceptional because of size, species, or historical significance will be given extra protections and consideration for retention.

5.8.4 Maintenance Practices – Maintenance practices will protect existing tree roots, trunks, or branches. Supportive practices for tree health will be prioritized by SPR, including mulching, irrigation, and the use of tree rings to build healthy soil conditions.

5.9 Wildlife Habitat

Commented [BT10]: Habitat elements consolidated with emphasis on retaining tree elements for ecological benefit.

In some instances, a portion of a tree removed for the reasons listed above will be left standing as a wildlife snag. When possible, this practice will be prioritized over total removal. Tree species, location, and park design will guide decisions about when to create wildlife snags. Logs and branches from removal or pruning operations will be left on-site, when possible, to contribute large woody debris to improve forest health and ecosystem services.

SPR will consider habitat impacts of tree removal and maintenance activities. Tree management activities will include seasonal considerations – such as bird nesting, amphibian breeding, and saturated wetland soils – and prioritize reducing negative ecosystem impacts.

5.10 Trees Adjacent to Private Property

Commented [BT11]: New section clarifies what to do when trees cross property lines. Vetted by Law.

5.10.1 Fallen Trees – In accordance with legal precedent, the owner of the property on which the tree or branch fell is responsible for cleaning up debris. If a tree or branch located on SPR property fails and falls on to private property, it is the private property owner's responsibility. If a private property owner's tree or branch fails and falls on SPR property, SPR is responsible.

5.10.2 Pruning Across Property Lines – If branches or roots from a tree on an adjacent property extend over a property line, the owner of that property is allowed to prune branches or roots back to their property line if they so choose so long as it does not compromise the health of the tree. Any proposed work on trees that straddle property lines will need to be agreed upon by both adjacent property owners.

5.10.3 Planting and Placement – Trees planted and placed on SPR property will be chosen in support of ecological benefits, habitat, and specific Vegetation Management Plans, and not for views, solar access, aesthetic preferences or other private benefits.

5.11 Recreational Use of Trees

Park users are not permitted to decorate, trim, build upon, remove, or otherwise cause damage to trees on SPR property. Webbing must be used for slacklines and hammocks, and only on trees at least 16-inches in diameter, to protect trees from damage. Any recreational use of trees is conducted at your own risk. Tree climbing by, or under the supervision of, qualified professionals may be permitted through a permit, concession agreement, or special event permit.

Commented [BT12]: New section clarifies what is allowed for recreational use and provides protections for trees.

5.12 Permitting

Unauthorized use of park property, including failure to apply for and obtain a Revocable Use Permit is unlawful and subject to enforcement actions or other remedies as specified in Seattle Municipal Code 18.30.

Commented [BT13]: Section simplifies language, removes procedures and practices, and updates and consolidates all permitting into one section.

SPR may allow the public to perform work or hire a contractor to perform work on property owned by SPR, through a Revocable Use Permit for Non-Park Use of Park Property. If access to or through SPR property is needed to maintain a tree on private property, a Revocable Use Permit is necessary.

6.0 DEFINITIONS

Certified Arborist: An individual who is current with the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) requirements and qualifications and currently holds the credential of Certified Arborist.

Green Seattle Partnership: A collaboration between the City of Seattle and community partners to restore and actively maintain Seattle's forested parklands.

Integrated Pest Management: Integrated Pest Management (IPM) is an effective and environmentally sensitive approach to pest management that relies on a combination of common-sense practices. IPM programs use current, comprehensive information on the life cycles of pests and their interaction with the environment. This information, in combination with available pest control methods, is used to manage pest damage by the most economical means, and with the least possible hazard to people, property, and the environment.

Pruning: The selective removal of plant parts using approved practices to meet specific goals and objectives. Can include root pruning.

Structural Defect: Any natural occurring or secondary condition such as cavity, poor branch attachment, cracks, or decayed wood in the trunk, crown or roots of a tree that may contribute to structural failure.

Topping: The severe and indiscriminate cutting back of limbs to stubs within the tree's crown, to such a degree as to remove the normal canopy and disfigure the tree; or the cutting back of limbs or branches to lateral branches that are not sufficiently large enough to assume the terminal role or are less than one-half of the diameter of the limb or branch that is cut.

Tree Canopy: The area of the city covered by the branch and leaf structure of trees. In the case of an individual tree, canopy is the branches and leaves.

Tree Removal: Destruction of a tree or tree parts, through either direct or indirect actions that cause irreversible damage and result in mortality.

Commented [BT14]: Removed: Clearing Thresholds, Developed Landscape, Undeveloped Landscape, Hazardous Tree, Tree Failure, Crown Cleaning, Crown Thinning, Crown Restoration, Phase of Work, Invasive Exotic Vegetation, Foliar Coverage, Mature Canopy Volume

Commented [BT15]: Should we use the definition as defined by SDCI: "Topping" means the cutting back of limbs to stubs within the tree's crown, to such a degree as to remove the normal canopy and disfigure the tree; or the cutting back of limbs or branches to lateral branches that are less than one-half of the diameter of the limb or branch that is cut. Topping does not include acceptable pruning practices as described in the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) "A-300 Pruning Standards" and companion "Best Management Practices for Tree Pruning" published by the International Society of Arboriculture, such as crown reduction, utility pruning, or crown cleaning to remove a safety hazard or dead or diseased material. Topping is considered "removal."

Tree Risk Assessment: A systematic approach for evaluating trees or groups of trees to determine the likelihood that a part, or multiple parts, may fail within a specified timeframe and impact targets.

Qualified Tree Risk Assessor: An individual who is proficient with the fundamentals of tree risk assessment; and understand the principles of advanced diagnostic techniques for assessing tree risk, can gather and synthesize the information needed to assess tree risk, and is able to make reasoned judgments and sound recommendations for mitigating identified risk.

Vegetation Management Plans: A plan for the long-term restoration, renovation, and care of the vegetation within the boundaries of a particular site.

Wildlife Snags: Dead or dying tree(s), or portions of tree(s) left standing to function as wildlife habitat as the tree naturally decomposes.

7.0 RESPONSIBILITY

It is SPR's responsibility to maintain trees on City-owned parkland for the benefit of the public good. After consideration of professional guidance from staff, the SPR Superintendent (or his/her designee) is authorized to make decisions regarding tree maintenance.

Commented [BT16]: Dramatically simplified to place all responsibility with SPR's arborists with oversight from the Superintendent.