

Tree Management Policy Update

Changes and Updates




Seattle
Parks & Recreation

Overview of Key Changes

- Ensuring alignment with current best management practices and industry standards
- Incorporation of climate change impacts and considerations
- Adding equity language for prioritization
- Including grounds management practices as part of tree care
- Expanded and updated recreational use language
- General updates and clarification

General Updates

- New template
- List of affected departments
- Definitions
- References

Department Policy		 Seattle Parks & Recreation
Tree Management Policy		Number: 5.6.1.2
		Date: March 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 Transportation
- Seattle City Light
- Seattle Public Utilities

4.0 REFERENCES

- Seattle Urban Forest Management Plan
- Executive Order: 03-05 Tree Replacement
- International Society of Arboriculture (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
- SMC 25.11 – Tree Protection
- SMC 18.30 – Enforcement Against Unauthorized Use of Park Property

Criteria

- Safety
- Park Function
- Urban Forest Health
- Equitable Distribution of Services

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.

Policy Versus Procedure

- Sections with procedures and practices removed
- ANSI-300 industry standards referenced instead
- Removed reference to practice of phasing work



Private Property, Pruning, and Views

- Clarified policy regarding property lines
- Expanded language regarding cutting for views to add other factors that are not considered
- Revocable Use Permits needed

5.10 Trees Adjacent to Private Property

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.

5.12 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.

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.

Recreational Use of Trees

- Addition of tree protection language
- Webbing requirements for slacklines and hammocks
- Individual use vs. commercial use (permits required)
- **Climb at own risk**



Tree Protections

- Do nothing that damages trees
- Protect during construction
- **Added maintenance practices to protect trees**

5.8 Tree Protection

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.

5.8.3 Rare Specimens – Individual trees that are considered rare 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.

Other Updates

- 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.
- Climate resiliency incorporated into planting elements, particularly for establishment periods.
- Supporting habitat benefits highlighted.



Stakeholder Outreach

Next steps: reach out to stakeholders before review by Park Board

- SPU/SDOT/OSE
- Forterra
- Cascade Land Conservancy
- Friends of Olmsted
- Other ideas?





Questions and Ideas?