Capturing the State of the Puget Sound Urban Canopy

Tools to support a healthy urban canopy

The Nature Conservancy
Washington

Photo by Hannah Letinich

Project Background & Goals

Our Vision is to foster healthy urban forests in Central Puget Sound (CPS) that produce multiple benefits: reduced stormwater pollution, improved air quality, captured carbon, expanded habitat, and improved human well-being. The goals of the project are to:

- Create a CPS Urban Tree Canopy (UTC) assessment based on best available science for use by organizations, and jurisdictions to prioritize UTC projects to achieve the highest return on investment
- Provide additional tools to support jurisdictions and organizations making decision about UTC projects
- Pilot urban carbon credit (CC) protocols to tap new sources of funding

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Top photo by Hannah Letinich
Bottom photo by Kelly Compton

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Project Partners

DAVEY Resource Group

CITY FOREST CREDITS

American Forests™

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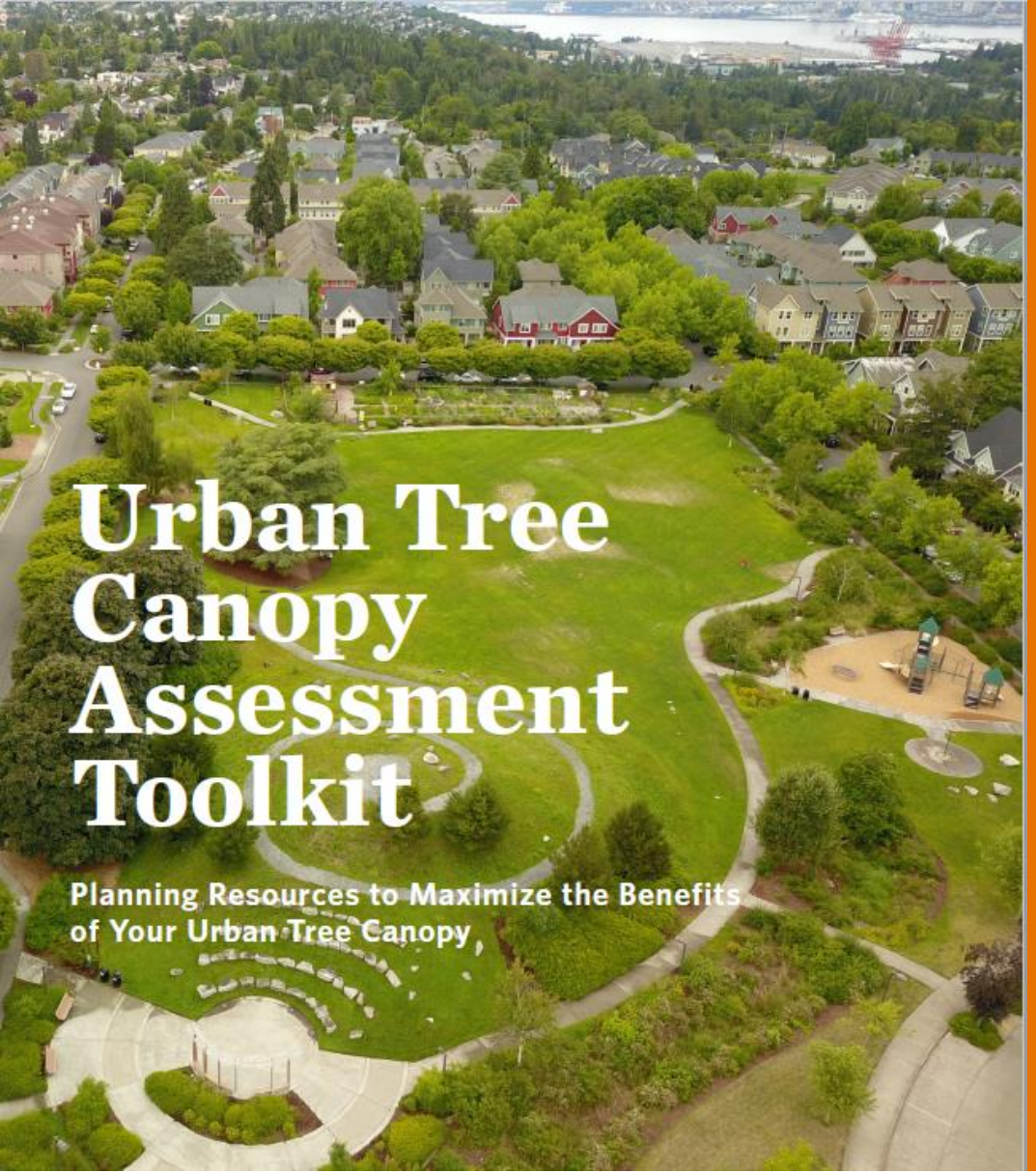

Resources for Practioners:

- High-resolution Tree Canopy Analysis for urban areas of Snohomish, King and Pierce Counties
- Planting prioritization storymap that considers heat, equity and stormwater criteria
- Optimized i-Tree Landscape and Tree Equity Score online tools
- Climate Species Guide for Puget Sound trees
- Case studies and information to explore urban carbon credits

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7-Steps to Building an Urban Tree Canopy Model

This guidance was developed using the framework and lessons learned from the Central Puget Sound project. While the approach your region may take will be shaped by local circumstances, here are basic steps to consider for your project based on lessons from Central Puget Sound:

1. Get organized

Build partnerships and secure funding. Partners include local and regional municipal stakeholders and expert resources. By bringing together a diverse set of partners, you can best leverage expertise and ensure the quality of the final product.

2. Identify local priorities

To ensure you are collecting and organizing the data that is most relevant, engage local municipalities, program partners and others to identify environmental, human health, and equity priorities. As part of this process, identify what prioritization tools already exist in your region that can be used to inform your project.

3. Capture tree canopy data

Collect and assemble existing urban forestry canopy cover datasets. In areas where current data does not exist, consider producing high-resolution GIS-based land cover layers at a regional scale using 1m color infrared aerial imagery and remotely-sensed data.

4. Identify high impact planting opportunities

Use the regional priorities and the available data layers to identify suitable planting locations across public and private property. Composite overall rankings focused on desired benefits or priorities (such as social equity, stormwater, urban heat island, etc.) assist decision makers in identifying high value planting projects.

5. Support place-based prioritization

To ensure place-based prioritization, consider incorporating the data into tools that allow practitioners in your region to explore different prioritization scenarios. Use Tree Equity Score to compare different census blocks based on equity considerations. With I-Tree Landscape you can create tree planting maps based on specific parameters for ecosystem services.

6. Prepare for the impacts of climate change

Develop a climate species guide to evaluate your existing trees and support species selection for future projects. The guide should include an analysis of anticipated climate trends and identify suitable climate-ready trees that are well-adapted to face present and future climatic challenges.

7. Consider carbon financing

Explore carbon credits as a funding source for planting or preservation with City Forest Credits.

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What is Next:

- Ensuring use of the tools
- Identifying partner cities for developing planting strategies
- Exploring how TNC can continue to support a healthy urban canopy in Washington

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Photo by Courtney Baxter