

MONTANA

Montana Department of Natural Resources & Conservation

The Montana DNRC Urban Forestry Program is fostering a tree equity initiative in three “starter” communities. Funded by a USDA Forest Service Sustainable Urban Forest Resilience (SUFR) grant, the project focuses on high-risk neighborhoods to create a healthier, resilient, and equitable urban forest. This highly anticipated project will strengthen community ties, promote social capital, and put the reinvestment back into the neighborhoods that have traditionally not received support from their local agencies. Working together to create tree equity starts at the ground level, creating a ripple effect that will bring adequate environmental services to all.

Montana Urban Forestry is implementing an innovative project through the Sustainable Urban Forest Resilience grant program, funded by the USDA Forest Service. The project is a joint effort involving three of Montana’s larger population centers: the City of Missoula, the City of Kalispell, and the City of Helena.

The project has three overarching objectives:

1. Establish growth space for plant propagation program:

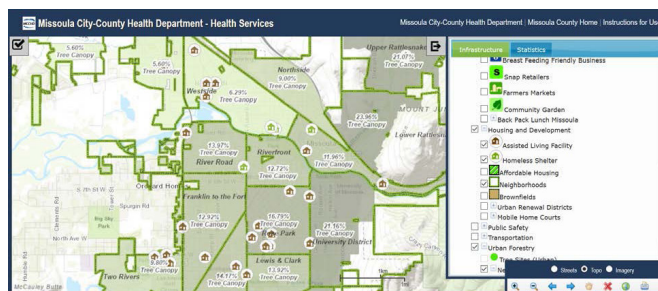
The City of Missoula will develop nursery space to grow large-sized trees and expand their successful gravel bed for more bareroot stock. Kalispell will partner with Missoula to utilize this space for growing trees for their community. Helena will utilize a holding space for their incoming stock through an ongoing partnership with the nearby City of Townsend, MT.

2. Mapping community need: Cities will identify and prioritize areas for tree planting using multiple map layers and data to address tree equity issues. The City of Missoula recently partnered with local health and climate experts to create an interactive map showing high-risk neighborhoods. Kalispell and Helena will follow suit towards this model for prioritizing tree planting efforts. Ideally, this process could be replicated and/or integrated into the statewide urban tree inventory to serve communities throughout the state.

3. Local outreach and education for tree equity: A seasonal employee will coordinate citizen outreach and

develop meaningful relationships within residential areas, prepare and distribute educational materials, and help tell the project’s story through social media. This individual will assist volunteer efforts and develop consistent and effective messaging regarding tree equity. The progress of this work will be communicated between Missoula, Kalispell, Helena, and DNRC to ensure close cooperation and collaboration. All educational resources and information will be made sharable to partner communities throughout the State of Montana.

This work will build a shared understanding of the value of urban forests and encourage planting proper species, watering, and care in underserved and disadvantaged neighborhoods. It could also influence policy change towards more environmental action and attention to these areas for improving infrastructure and green space. This work will hopefully gain momentum and help guide urban forestry efforts across cities statewide, ensuring that all urban forestry activities are conducted through an equity lens.



(Bottom left) Map and layers developed for deciphering high-risk areas and needs. Photo: J. Kirby DNRC screenshot of map. Source: <https://gis.missoulacounty.us/mcchd/healthmap>

(Above left) A planting partner readies a tree for the shelter plantings. Montana Urban and Community Forestry Association (MUCFA) granted funds to the Missoula Poverello Center, a homeless shelter, for tree planting. Photo: MUCFA Grant Summary Report

(Above right) Courtyard area with new trees planted from MUCFA and local partners. Photo: MUCFA Grant Summary Report