

In two formerly under-served neighborhoods of Denver, community organizations and the Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS) are coming together to leverage trees to improve community health.

There are two communities in Denver that have become the focal point for urban environmental health issues. These communities are Globeville and Elyria Swansea (GES). Attracted to the railroad and metal smelting industries, immigrants settled here in the late 1800s. Currently, GES is home to over 10,000 full time residents, eighty-four percent of whom are Hispanic. With the passage of time and the construction of an interstate highway system, the negative impacts to air, water, and soil quality have greatly increased.

In 2014, a study completed by the Denver Environmental Health department identified many health problems caused by poor air and water quality in the South Platte River, offensive odors, and traffic

noise. Concerned partners, working with community members, developed a list of recommendations to mitigate these negative impacts by targeting environmental quality, community safety, and mental health. Among the extensive list of mitigation options was an identified need to plant more trees to increase the total tree canopy in GES, which was only five percent, well below the eighteen percent cover that Denver leaders would like to see across the city.

As a result, three distinct groups are currently focused on increasing the canopy cover in GES. The Nature Conservancy has one of their Denver-based staff reaching out to the

community and has sponsored spring and fall planting events. The Park People, a non-profit tree advocacy group, will be working with like-minded organizations to promote tree planting. Denver City forestry has a diverse list of sixteen shade trees and five ornamentals available for planting along the public right-of-way. City staff will prepare the planting site, assist with planting, and will water the trees for the first year. Additionally, CSFS is providing technical assistance to the tree planning effort.



1. Volunteers assist with tree plantings in the communities of Globeville and Elyria Swansea. **2.** Community and volunteer tree planting event in Fall 2019. **3.** Community members come together to lend a helping hand. Photo Credit: The Nature Conservancy.

