

MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES & CONSERVATION

Montana's Urban and Community Forestry (U&CF) Program has noteworthy efforts that link urban forestry to public health. The U&CF program encourages and promotes innovative ways to support health and well-being through financial, technical, and educational assistance. Several projects are in progress and quickly gaining momentum, serving as examples for other communities across the state. Much of this is due to local stakeholders and organizations working together to bridge the connection between green infrastructure and human health. In Missoula, MT, a large group of partners recently came together to develop projects including health equity neighborhood studies, infrastructure plans, and prioritized improvements toward the walkability and livability of the community.

Missoula, MT has a diverse group of leaders working toward a common goal: Build a healthy, resilient Missoula and promote health equity for all. This group's primary focus includes public safety and the environment.

In 2016, the City of Missoula received a special grant from Invest Health; a collaboration between the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Reinvestment Fund. According to Invest Health, "This initiative was developed to provide an opportunity for mid-sized cities to transform the way local leaders work together to create solution-driven and diverse partnerships. These partnerships will emphasize making changes in low-income neighborhoods to improve resident health and well-being."¹



Urban forestry breakout session during the Missoula Invest Health Summit. Photo Credit: Jamie Kirby.

The Department of Natural Resources & Conservation's (DNRC) Urban and Community Forestry program was invited to take part in Missoula's Invest Health Summit in November 2017. Trees For Missoula, a tree advocacy group, partnered with DNRC to facilitate a breakout session focused on urban forestry. Participants in this session included city council members, city/county planners and staff, climate change experts, arborists, landscapers, and university students. At the summit, attendees identified action items to improve Missoula's health equity, listing urban forest improvement projects as priority.

Spurred by the Invest Health Summit and the priority placed on urban forest improvements, Missoula initiated two urban forest improvement projects with ties to human health. The first project increases green infrastructure within Missoula's low-income neighborhoods. The community will prioritize sidewalk and trail networks in new ways by concentrating around community hubs and areas that lack sidewalks and by planning for tree plantings and other green infrastructure.

The second project, funded with a DNRC Urban Forestry grant through the USDA Forest Service, will install a shade shelter along a popular pedestrian and bike path in Missoula. This new shelter stems from efforts by another nonprofit partner, Climate Smart Missoula, as part of their drive to address increased summer temperatures and vulnerable populations. The shelter utilizes reclaimed wood and will provide much-needed shade along the hottest section of the trail. Drought-tolerant trees planted alongside the structure will eventually provide additional shade and protection from the elements. The shelter - designed by a local architect firm - recently received national recognition for the unique design.

The culmination of these efforts will ultimately help improve the health and quality of life for Missoula's residents. These projects are successful examples of broad-scale collaboration and ingenuity and serve as demonstration for other communities to consider when planning for healthy trees, healthy communities.

¹ <https://www.investhealth.org/>



Shade shelter utilizes reclaimed wood and locally-sourced materials. Photo Credit: Climate Smart Missoula.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Montana Department of Natural Resources & Conservation, Urban and Community Forestry Program
<http://dnrc.mt.gov/divisions/forestry/forestry-assistance/urban-and-community-forestry>