

MONTANA

Montana Department of Natural Resources & Conservation

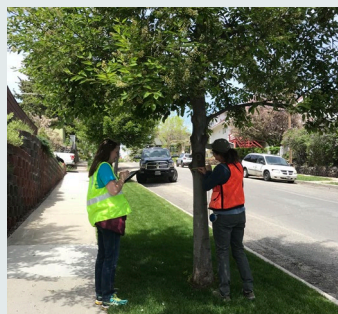
Montanans live in a vast area of natural beauty ranging from mountainous communities to open prairie towns. The fourth largest state, with over 147,000 square miles, the land spans across four different climate zones. The smallest Tree City USA has a population of 125 and the largest has 110,323. These factors shape Montana's urban and community forests in many ways. Communities throughout the state view forestry based on these unique environmental, cultural, and social factors. One such Montana community shaped by all these factors is Butte, Montana.

Butte, Montana has a very rich history as a mining town located in the Rocky Mountains, right at the Continental Divide. In its heyday, it was the largest city between Chicago and San Francisco.¹ Now with a population of approximately 33,500, it is the fifth largest city in the state. Butte has the nation's largest superfund site in the upper Clark Fork River, as well as Berkeley Pit, an open mine area filled with acidic water which has become a tourist attraction. Tree planting conditions are tricky with contaminated soils and some of the coldest year-round temperatures on record in the state.

The town is full of energetic and passionate people that carry pride for its resilience and ability to adapt. The Urban Forest Board of Butte-Silver Bow is no different. The Board has made huge strides in recent years toward beautification and urban forest restoration. Some of these accomplishments include:

Adding an arborist position. In 2018, the Council of Commissioners approved funds for a long-needed arborist position. This is the first position of its kind for the community. The Board worked diligently to gain support from their elected officials over the course of two years to bring this position into reality. Having a local arborist familiar with the local climate and conditions will greatly increase the vitality and health of the urban forest.

Green space transformations in uptown area. Butte's geography is indeed unique. The historic district resides on a steep slope of the hill where the mines are located. Hundreds of tunnels run under the streets and homes, sometimes creating sinkholes. Butte is home to one of the nation's largest National Historic Landmark Districts with more than 4,000 historic structures scattered across the hill.² The community is restoring and transforming abandoned lots and other properties into green space, some of it funded with Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) grant dollars (through USDA Forest Service State & Private Forestry).



DNRC employee takes measurements while training a seasonal employee on collecting tree data for the new inventory. Photo Credit: Jamie Kirby, DNRC

Updating an urban forest inventory. The new arborist and supporting staff recognize the need to have current and accurate data. In 2019, The Mining City successfully received grant funds through DNRC's Urban & Community Forestry (UCF) program to revive their public tree inventory. Last recorded in 2012, the inventory revealed an overabundance of chokecherry, green ash, and crabapple species – totaling 46% of the urban forest altogether.³ This new inventory will hopefully reflect some shift in composition as the city strives for a more diverse and resilient urban forest.

1 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Butte,_Montana#cite_note-24

2 <http://www.mainstreetbutte.org/>

3 Factsheet of Butte-Silver Bow's 2012 tree inventory: <http://dnrc.mt.gov/divisions/forestry/docs/assistance/urban/docs-urban-factsheets/montana-fact-sheet-butte-silver-bow.pdf>



City-county staff and urban forest board volunteers work together to plant trees for Arbor Day, across from the county courthouse. Photo Credit: Charlie O'Leary, Butte Urban Forest Board



A local pilot project, planners planted hundreds of trees in an open space to utilize in remediation efforts. Note the mine shaft in the back right of the photograph. DNRC funded similar, smaller scale projects in the residential and business areas of the town to transform the area into functional greenspace. Photo Credit: Jamie Kirby, DNRC

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation
Urban & Community Forestry Program

<http://dnrc.mt.gov/divisions/forestry/forestry-assistance/urban-and-community-forestry>