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Award Name: Innovative Program Award
Nominator: Robert Northrop
Nominee: Developing a Strategy for Urban Forest Sustainability in the City of
Tampa

Michael G. Andreu, Ph.D.
Melissa Friedman
Shawn Landry
Robert Northrop (FANREP member)

Description:

Tampa's urban forest plays a significant role in maintaining the vitality of urban life. The urban forest provides a wealth of benefits to neighborhoods and communities through the reduction of energy consumption, the removal of pollutants from the air and water, reduction in storm water flows, increased valuation of private property, increased worker productivity, reduction in stress and violent crime, as well as providing recreational opportunities and aesthetic diversity. At the same time stresses from the urban environment including air pollution, increased impervious surface, soil compaction, and negligence reduce the diversity and magnitude of these benefits.

Close interaction of people and trees require that urban and community tree and forest resources be actively and diligently managed to ensure public safety. Reducing risks while maximizing value within this dynamic urban system requires that the city's urban forest management programs be grounded in ecological science and recognize the interplay between the bio-physical and social aspects of the city. The initial step in using an ecological approach to meet these challenges is the identification and organization of baseline information in the form of an inventory that describes the location, composition, structure, and health of the trees and woodlands within the urban forest landscape.

Through a collaborative effort that involved the University of Florida, the University of South Florida, and the Hillsborough County Extension, an ecological analysis of Tampa's urban forest was undertaken during 2007. An inventory of more than 500 plots and the interpretation of high resolution aerial imagery allowed us to develop baseline information on location, composition, structure, and health. Field data was analyzed using the U.S. Forest Service Urban Forest Effects Model (UFORE) to determine ecological function and service provided as well all the economic value of the economic services.

The inventory and analysis were organized into a report, 'City of Tampa – Urban Ecological Analysis, 2006-2007', and formally presented to the Mayor, her Executive Staff and the Division of Parks and Recreation who administer all of the city's tree and forest programs. These presentations and discussions were met with great enthusiasm and interest. A separate formal presentation was made to the Tampa City Council.

At the Mayor's request we organized the 'City of Tampa - Mayor's Symposium on Community Trees and the Urban Forest' at the Tampa Convention Center and presented our findings. The program brought more than 120 community and business leaders together to hear the outcomes of the study and through a series of facilitated workshops begin to identify a 'Strategy for Urban Forest Sustainability'. The Mayor supported this initiative.

At the Mayor's request we designed and conducted a series of workshops to develop a 'vision statement' and 'goals' for achieving urban forest sustainability in the City of Tampa. The Mayor appointed a Task Force of 15 community and business leaders to participate in the workshops. Outcomes from this exercise led to the identification of the need for hiring a City Urban Forester, the development of long range management plans for publicly owned land, a series of initiatives to support conservation on private land, education within the schools and adult education, and protection of trees and woodlands during land use change.

We directly participated in the interview and hiring process for the Urban Forester position, developed a series of fact sheets on the Urban ecological Analysis (see attachments) requested by the Mayor's Task Force, conducted an analysis of potential planting sites within the City using aerial photo interpretation – as part of their long range planning process (see attached), are presently conducting a social survey of all the neighborhood associations to determine the perceived values and costs of trees to the citizens, and have begun working with the Parks and Recreation Dept. to develop a detailed 10 – year management plan for the urban forest that is integrated into all aligned facets of the City's government. The City of Tampa has incorporated language and information directly from the urban ecological analysis into its 2008 Comprehensive Plan and is adjusting site development processes and considerations based upon the recommendations coming out of the Task Force workshops.

We thank you for consideration ... Rob