From the USDA Forest Service and Partners

What *OurTrees* Can Tell Us:

The Newest i-Tree Tool to Help Engage your Community

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Arborists and urban foresters have a compelling story to tell—their work to plant and care for urban trees and forests makes a tremendous difference in our communities! Fortunately, i-Tree is freely accessible 24/7 to help tell that story and more. In this article we will explore the newest tool, called **OurTrees**, which gives us the power to engage communities and tell a story about current and potential tree canopy and the benefits forests provide in communities across the continental United States.

OurTrees is a web-based app that works with modern browsers to deliver intuitive summaries and graphics quickly and easily on the many benefits of trees and forests from the convenience of the user's favorite device, whether a mobile phone or a laptop. There's no need to download and install an app; simply navigate to OurTrees.

The Need for OurTrees

With the unprecedented funding opportunities in the United States presented by the passage of the Inflation Reduction Act, community leaders and practitioners are on the ground floor of significant new investment in urban and community forestry. Sharing the story of the benefits of trees and forests is critical to growing local support and securing new investments at the community level.

OurTrees was created to provide relevant, easy-to-use benchmarks for advocates who are building and supporting tree care programs while promoting an equitable distribution of environmental benefits at the local level. It provides summary reports that highlight existing and potential canopy contributions to mitigate climate change impacts and improve human health outcomes. It also enables users to compare one community's canopy cover with that of adjacent communities to help inform the urgency of investment.

Putting OurTrees to Work

OurTrees is a quick assessment tool for communities of all sizes across the United States that can be used in addition to American Forests' Tree Equity Score (TES) and the White House Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST) to begin targeting resources where they are needed most. Both TES and **OurTrees** draw their benefit estimates information from i-Tree Landscape, which is a powerful, map-oriented tool for the entire United States. i-Tree Landscape helps users evaluate environmental and demographic data for their area using many layers of information at a minimum of 30-meter (98-foot) canopy resolution, with meter level data available at select locations. A layer of CEJST Census Tracts is newly available in i-Tree Landscape to support user analysis of equity in the distribution of tree canopy benefits. >>

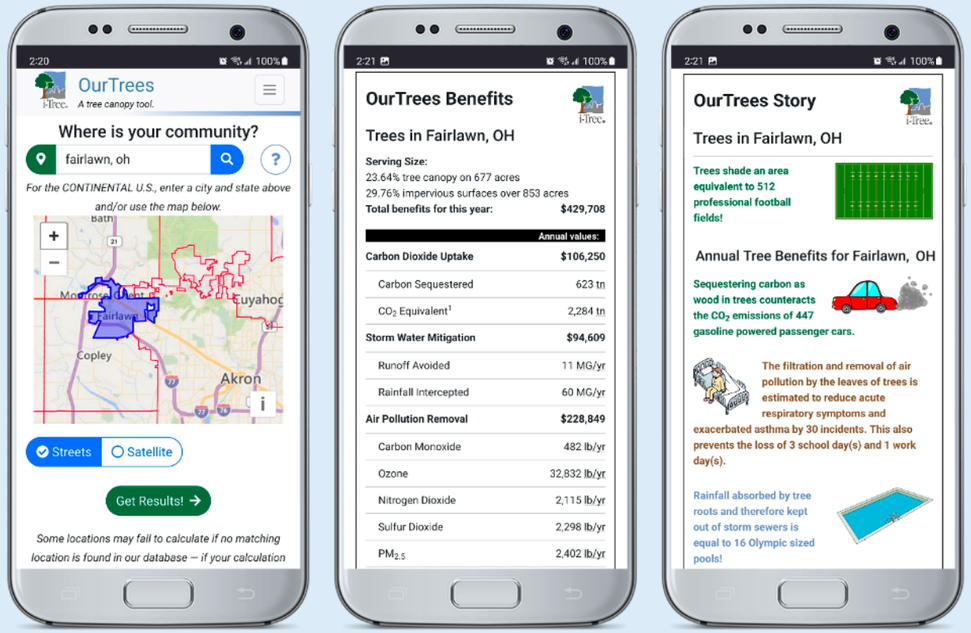

Figure 1. OurTrees provides tree canopy and ecosystem service benefits for towns and cities within the continental United States listed in both a nutrition-label format and shown as real-world equivalencies.

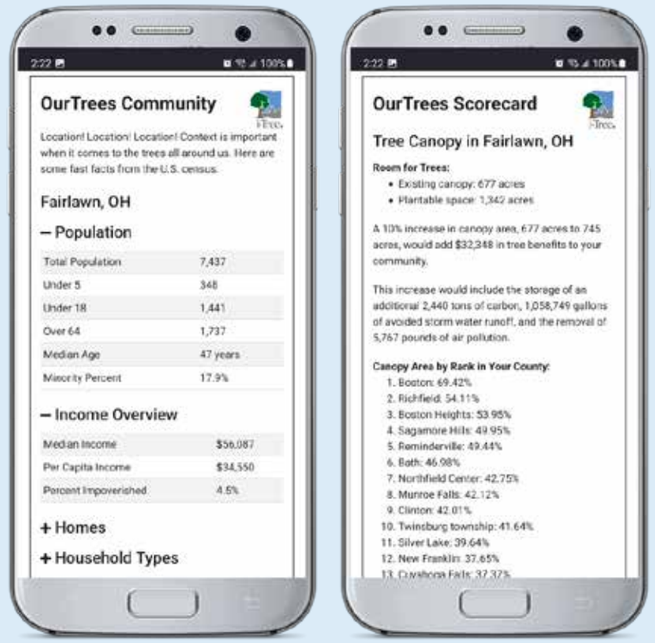

Figure 2. OurTrees provides community demographic context in addition to forest benefits. It includes a scorecard that shows how the community ranks with adjacent communities and it shows what additional benefits would accrue from a 10% increase in canopy cover.

OurTrees is geared towards simplicity to quickly provide both new and experienced users of all ages and backgrounds with relatable and easy-to-understand results. To start the app, users simply enter their community's name and with just a few clicks, they can explore the value their trees and forests provide. The benefit values within **OurTrees** are communicated in the following ways to aid in understanding their impacts on everyday life:

- The **OurTrees Benefits** tab reports the percent and area of tree canopy cover and impervious surface cover, sequestered and stored carbon, storm water mitigation, and air pollution removal in a familiar "nutrition label" format (Figure 1).
- Helpful illustrations and comparisons to real-world equivalents, such as the number of football fields worth of shade, the amount of carbon dioxide emitted by car exhausts absorbed by trees, examples of human health improvements in terms of asthma reduction and fewer work/school days lost, and stormwater runoff volume in terms of Olympic-sized swimming pools are shown in the **OurTrees Story** tab (Figure 1).
- The **OurTrees Community** tab provides basic demographic data from the U.S. Census population analyses of income level, minority data, housing, household type, and home tenure (Figure 2).
- A summary of the existing canopy area, available space for additional plantings, and projected benefits of a 10% increase in tree canopy cover are found in the **OurTrees Scorecard** tab. In addition, the canopy cover of the user-selected community is ranked relative to others within the same county (Figure 2).

Sharing OurTrees

Members of the Society of Municipal Arborists are encouraged to use this tool to talk about the impact of their work to plant and care for trees. Sharing this tool with community members and leaders, school groups, environmentally-based non-profit organizations, and faith-based organizations will foster conversations about tree cover and its benefits. In this way, the simple stories from **OurTrees** can help you to grow local support for your tree care program and hopefully encourage planting of even more trees.

OurTrees Background and Technical Support

i-Tree delivers current, peer-reviewed tree benefit estimation science from the USDA Forest Service to all types of users through freely accessible tools and support. i-Tree was established in 2006 as a unique and innovative public/private partnership among government, business, academic, and professional organizations including the USDA Forest Service, Davey Tree Expert Company, Arbor Day Foundation, Society of Municipal Arborists, International Society of Arboriculture, Casey Trees, and the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry. With over 750,000 users across 185 countries, i-Tree has grown into the global standard for quantifying forest structure, function, and value, while guiding management needs. i-Tree continues to evolve and expand to reflect improving science as well as user community needs and feedback. The science behind i-Tree tools like **OurTrees** is accessible in a compendium publication: Understanding i-Tree: Summary of Programs and Methods.

OurTrees, and its ease of use, is just one example of continued co-development of i-Tree in direct response to feedback from a growing and diverse user community, which includes professional arborists and foresters, non-profits, advocates, educators, innovators, community residents, government leaders, technicians, and consultants. The individual i-Tree tools vary in purpose, scale, sophistication, reporting, and user access—but they are all designed to promote and assist tree and forest management and to communicate the ecosystem services trees bring to both the public and community leaders.

The i-Tree team provides full support for all these tools at www.itreetools.org. The website has helpful guidance on what tools to use, step-by-step directions, educational materials including "how-to" videos, the science behind the tools, example projects, and discussion forums. The i-Tree team offers regular office hours as well as i-Tree Training Academies, an ongoing learning series providing a broad introduction to the i-Tree suite of tools. These virtual opportunities are free for everyone; refer to the i-Tree website regularly for new sessions and to sign up. If you get stuck on anything related to i-Tree or have suggestions or success stories, you can always reach out with an email to info@itreetools.org.

New USFS Resources

New Model Website: Prescribe Outside

A new partnership in Philadelphia has produced a breakthrough online resource applying research findings to help families become more healthy and happy by spending time outside in nature. Prescribe Outside is Philadelphia's new nature prescription program partnership between Children's Hospital, Awbury Arboretum, Let's Go Outdoors, and the US Forest Service.

The goal of the program is to provide physicians and families with tools to improve the health and happiness of Philadelphia children by helping them locate and use safe, accessible, and convenient public green space, and to discover the benefits of time spent in nature. Perhaps you can replicate this in your community!

Case studies: Biocultural Stewardship in Urban Areas

The Division of Urban Forestry within the City and County of Honolulu's Department of Parks and Recreation manages street trees, park trees, botanical gardens, community gardens, and, since 2019, a community forestry program. The Division's vision is to "preserve the natural environment; protect wildlife habitat; create educational, social, and recreational opportunities; and increase the quality of life of Honolulu residents by preserving and increasing Honolulu's tree canopy."

A new paper in the journal *Sustainability* describes how this program and its partners work together to address contemporary Indigenous stewardship in urban areas of Oʻahu, Hawaiʻi. Specifically, this paper explores Urban ʻĀina, a practice-based Native Hawaiian paradigm that shapes how urban landscapes are engaged as Indigenous spaces.

The practice revitalizes the expression of Indigenous knowledge, and relies on Indigenous sensibilities to address and respond to food insecurity, ecological degradation, and climate change. Urban ʻĀina practices operate within cultural kīpuka—biocultural refugia where kincentric, reciprocal relationships are honored through the engagement of ancestral knowledge. The sharing of innovative case studies from urban Oʻahu brings breath and the healing power of Indigenous knowledge and ancestral practices to urban spaces, with the aim of transforming contemporary conceptions of urban stewardship.