

## Feds come to study trunks and leaves in City of Trees

By Denise Oshodi  
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If you see someone nosing around the tree along the street in front of your house, don't worry: It's part of a research project to measure the value of Boise's leafy bounty.

Starting Monday, a research group will collect leaves and measure trunks on nearly 800 Boise streetside and park trees, and the activity is expected to last for a few weeks.

The survey is part of a U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service analysis happening in 19 cities across the nation, including New York City, Honolulu and Modesto, Calif. The Forest Service wants to measure the dollar value of public trees — especially ones next to the street. The goal is to compel cities

to take better care of their trees and plant new ones, Kelaime Vargas, urban landscape ecologist for the California-based Center for Urban Forest Research, said Monday.

The Forest Service will collect the samples, measurements and other data and crunch the numbers. The end result will tell Boise how much in dollars the city's public-space trees are worth, which tree species are more valuable, how much people save in energy costs by having trees, what impact trees have on air pollution, and other benefits public trees bring.

"Trees are often seen as a luxury item in the city budget," Vargas said. "No one ever had really thought of it in terms of (their) actual dollar value."

Once cities see that trees' benefits outweigh the costs

of care, then they'll be better equipped to argue for better tree-care budgets, she said.

Boise Parks and Recreation is spending about \$15,000 of its 2005 budget for the study, said Amy Stahl, spokeswoman for Boise Parks and Recreation. This money matches the estimated \$80,000 to \$100,000 in federal money it will take to finish Boise's analysis, said Shelley Gardner, urban forester with the Center for Urban Forest Research.

By the time the study ends in June, Boise will get an inventory guide of the surveyed trees and access to a software inventory program that would help the city plan its tree care and planting.

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Chris Butler / The Idaho Statesman  
Forestry specialist Brian Jorgenson joins Kelaime Vargas, left, and Shelley Gardner of the USDA Center for Urban Forest Research as they look at a tree Monday in Boise's Municipal Park. The fencing keeps beavers from damaging the tree. The flip-flops are not part of the protection.