



U.S. FOREST SERVICE

Action Plan for Improved Urban Forest Science Delivery

2019-2020

*The Forest Service is working across mission areas to address critical urban forest technology and science delivery needs. **This action plan represents a shared commitment to deliver quality social, ecological and economic science, technology, and information to improve the long-term sustainability of urban and community ecosystems.** The plan sets forth a suite of near-term actions to create a comprehensive, coordinated, and streamlined delivery system for urban forest research, information, and technology into the future.*

Call to Action

The mission of the Forest Service is "to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations", a charge we have been carrying out for well over three decades through the delivery of urban forest research, technology, and information. Co-creating and sharing knowledge and tools is essential to improving the management and long-term sustainability of urban ecosystems. We are responsive to our partners and customers, including state forestry agencies, National Forests, non-profit organizations, private industry, academic institutions, and local governments, all of whom are seeking credible data and guidance to support their management, training and policy decisions. This demand for credible information is increasing as threats¹ put increasing pressure on our forests and as our audience and customer base expands to new user groups such as public works, planning, sustainability, public health, and disaster response professionals. **We aim to grow our capacity and be more efficient and effective in reaching a diverse audience, both internally and externally.**

In recent years communication tools have dramatically evolved and multiplied, making it critically important for the Forest Service and our urban staffs in particular to become strategic, skillful, creative, and nimble in delivering science and technology. **We aim to be contemporary in reaching our diverse audiences and share information that is timely, relevant, and easy to access, understand, and use.**

Communicating knowledge by making it available and accessible is a key goal of our [USDA Forest Service Strategic Plan for FY2015-2020 \(pp. 24-31\)](#) as well as the [USDA Strategic Plan FY 2018—2022 \(pp. 39-43\)](#).

Our Vision

The Forest Service is a contemporary, rich, and engaging source of information for urban forest science, technology, and expertise that is used and valued by a diverse set of partners, stakeholders, and clients. Communities in the United States and across the world access Forest Service information to inform decisions about their urban and community forests, parks, and watersheds for the well-being of all people.

¹ Including severe storms, insects and diseases, invasive plants, fire, drought and development.

Current Focus

During our start-up phase we significantly reshaped and streamlined our internal practices and networks to become better informed and coordinated across Forest Service units; launched a national 'science, policy, and practice' webinar series that now reaches over 1,000 natural resource and urban sustainability professionals; and began an effort to develop urban forestry state-of-the-science briefing materials to support knowledge sharing and local decision-making.

During our second phase (2016-2018), we launched the Vibrant Cities Lab, a web platform dedicated to delivering best available science and tools around urban forestry that has had over 6000 unique visitors since November 2017, more than 1000 of whom have become repeat users; continued our successful webinar series; and completed one state-of-the-science synthesis on public health (two more- UTC Assessment and Stormwater- are in progress).

Over the next two years we will continue our successful national webinar series; provide best available science and tools on the Vibrant Cities Lab web portal and actively promote it to partners and as a central hub to connect, retrieve, and share urban technology, research, and information; update and streamline our Forest Service urban websites; activate collaborative partnership networks to inform our work and distribute our products; evolve our science synthesis products to take advantage of opportunities to leverage existing work; and engage in the Urban Field Station Network, bringing practitioner needs to the research community and utilizing our science delivery pathways. We will find opportunities to leverage existing platforms, including Vibrant Cities Lab, the Urban Forest Connections webinar series and the emerging Urban Field Station Network to promote shared learning.

We see two major developing programs within the Forest Service that can help to inform the direction of our work. First, we recognize that the Urban Field Stations offer rich potential for building long term datasets, collaborative, comparative research across cities and ecosystems, and learning and exchange across locations in ways that serve all mission areas, partners, and stakeholders. There is opportunity to grow our network nationally and to create visible linkages to the USDA, Forest Service, and Chief's strategic goals and priorities, expand partnerships, and strengthen scientific collaboration to better serve stakeholder needs.

Second, Urban FIA is growing across the nation with over 25 cities currently participating in the program. The program will eventually involve over 100 cities across the U.S. to build a strategic, national inventory of urban forests. The program includes annualized inventory of trees in urban settings that provides key data to assess the extent, volume, status, and trends of urban trees and forests, including the services they provide, their health, and future risk from insects and disease. There is an important role for TSD to work with Urban FIA nationally and regionally to promote, implement, and utilize the inventory for management and research.

Our team focus for the next two years will be on:

Developing Content (WHAT)

We will continue to respond to the growing demand for science information. We will leverage opportunities to nationalize regional and station-based products and to work with partners to produce content.

Delivering products (HOW)

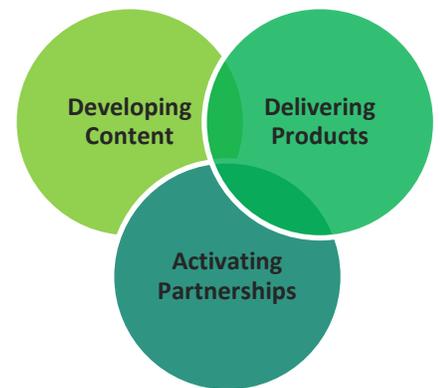
We will focus on production and delivery, to make sure that our information is available, accessible, and widely used.

Activating team partnerships (WHO)

We will engage key partners to inform our work and achieve the best outcomes.

Monitoring effectiveness

We will generate quantifiable outcome measures that allow us to track our success, and we will revisit and refine our goals over time to ensure that we are meeting our needs and those of our stakeholders.



Team

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Lauren Marshall: S&PF-Washington Office (co-chair)

Sarah Hines: R&D- Northern Research Station

Jill Johnson, Julie Mawhorter: S&PF-Northeastern Area

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Amanda Egan: S&PF-Regions 1 and 4

Kathy Sheehan: S&PF-Regions 6 and 10

Ali San Gil: S&PF-Region 3

Miranda Hutten: S&PF-Region 5

Nora Davis: R&D- Pacific Southwest Research Station

Nehalem Clark: R&D-Rocky Mountain Research Station

2019-2020 ACTIONS

ONGOING ACTIONS

1. **Deliver high quality, relevant webinars that bring together research, practice, and policy:** *Work with internal and external partners to identify relevant topics; build out 12- month schedule that allows front loading of work.*

PURPOSE: *To ensure practitioners have access to the state of the science, as well as case studies that demonstrate science application through practice and policy; to brand the USFS as leaders in research and knowledge transfer.*

MEASURABLE GOAL: *Ten webinars each fiscal year, reaching an average live audience of 175 and receiving at least 85% 4- or 5- star ratings by the end of FY20.*

2. **Publish science synthesis products on the topics of Urban Tree Canopy, and Green Stormwater Infrastructure:** *Finalize the remaining science synthesis topics.*

PURPOSE: *To provide practitioners, policy makers, and decision makers access to easily digestible summaries of the state of the science for timely, relevant topics.*

MEASURABLE GOAL: *Finalize remaining science synthesis topics and post to Vibrant Cities Lab by the end of calendar year 2019.*

3. **Maintain and grow the use of the internal 'FS Urban' email distribution list (PDL)**

PURPOSE: *To promote effective and efficient flow of information and opportunities across FS units, foster networking and sharing, and inspire internal interest in urban natural resources stewardship.*

MEASURABLE GOAL: *Two substantive PDL posts per week; at least two PDL posts from R&D or NFS per month.*

4. **Maintain 'FS Urban' Inbox**

PURPOSE: *To embrace the notion of "One Forest Service" in our communications with partners and stakeholders and provide a welcoming environment for stakeholder comments and feedback. Serves as point of contact for Vibrant Cities Lab website.*

MEASURABLE GOAL: *Respond to all inquiries within three business days.*

5. **Grow the use of the Vibrant Cities Lab and suggest/review content for the site**

PURPOSE: *To ensure Vibrant Cities Lab is relevant and up-to-date with best available science, and that it is regularly used by our partners across diverse sectors and disciplines as an authoritative source of best available science and tools.*

MEASURABLE GOAL: *Once final versions are received, new resources are reviewed and sent on to American Forests within 60 days. At least 5 new resources are reviewed each month. Report our quarterly on these goals. The site will attract at least 1,000 new visitors per month and 700 repeat visitors.*

NEW 2019 ACTIONS

1. Engage in the Urban Field Station Network

Plug in to the UFS Network to help them utilize our distribution channels, bring practitioner needs to the table, and pull in other TSD members to working groups as needed.

PURPOSE: *to discover, build upon, and improve efficacy of our common goals to co-develop and co-produce scientific knowledge to inform the management of urban forests.*

MEASURABLE GOAL: *At least one TSD member engages in each UFS Network call.*

2. Update national and regional Forest Service websites

PURPOSE: *To ensure we are providing up-to-date, relevant information that best serves our customers and supports the Forest Service as a leader in social-ecological research and technology transfer.*

MEASURABLE GOAL: *Update National R&D website, including TSD website, by end of calendar year 2019. Explore moving TSD website under “urban forests” instead of nested under research.*

3. Effectively engage stakeholders in two way communication: Engage groups that serve as key communication nodes to tap into stakeholder needs, solicit feedback and disseminate information. Create strategies for how best to send out announcements and products and for how to carry research needs back to our research community. Stand up a Community of Practice that convenes researchers and practitioners around thematic topics. Work with Urban Field Station Network to develop a system for feeding practitioner needs to researchers.

PURPOSE: *To ensure we are meeting the needs of our stakeholders and leveraging efforts to have the greatest impact.*

MEASURABLE GOAL: *Convene at least 2 Community of Practice calls in FY2019. Articulate a clear and coherent strategy for information dissemination and collection by April 2019.*

4. Create a quarterly TSD digest summarizing new science, grant activities, etc.

PURPOSE: *To provide scientific information to people who make and influence decisions about urban forest stewardship.*

MEASURABLE GOAL: *Develop a methodology for identifying topics and news/events that will be captured. Produce two digest summaries in FY19.*