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New Report Helps Sustain America's Urban Trees and Forests

NEWTOWN SQUARE, Pa., September 20, 2010 -- A USDA Forest Service, Northern Research Station (NRS) report released today, Sustaining America's Urban Trees and Forests, can help those who manage and care about urban trees and forests to increase public awareness of their importance, their many benefits, and the various factors that challenge the management of these critical resources.

Prepared by Forest Service urban forest researchers and managers, this report provides an overview of the current status and benefits of America's urban forests and how they vary among regions of the country. It also describes the challenges facing urban forests and their implications for forest management.

“Urban forests are an integral part of community ecosystems, whose numerous elements (such as people, animals, buildings, infrastructure, water, and air) interact to significantly affect the quality of urban life,” said lead author Dr. David Nowak, Northern Research Station urban forest researcher. “These trees provide essential services such as energy use reduction, conservation of air, soil and water quality; provision of wildlife habitat; improvement of property values and commercial benefits; and maintenance of human physical and mental health.”

For 220 million urban-dwelling Americans (nearly 80% of the U.S. population), yard and street trees and small parks are their closest forest. The term “urban forests” describes all privately and publicly owned trees in urban areas, and the total U.S. urban forest contains an estimated 3.8 billion trees. The authors also noted that these urban trees face challenges, such as invasive plants and insects, wildfire, air pollution and climate change, which will increase as urban areas expand over the next 50 years.

The USDA Forest Service conducts both research and management programs for urban forests. Dr. Nowak's urban forestry research programs have inventoried and analyzed urban forests in many cities and, with help from numerous partners, have developed innovative computer tools and programs such as i-Tree.

Sustaining America's Urban Trees and Forests is a product of the USDA Forest Service's Forests on the Edge Program, which presents data prepared and analyzed by scientists across the country to help the public and citizen's groups know and value the contributions of and pressures on America's forests and to create new tools for strategic planning. Both electronic and printed copies of *Sustaining America's Urban Trees and Forests* can be ordered at www.nrs.fs.fed.us/pubs/35572 .

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