

## Management Needs Survey

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By definition, a tree inventory is a detailed accounting of all publicly owned trees within a community, usually keyed to a specific location like a street address or block. Information such as size, condition, species, maintenance, tree health needs, and even site information such as the existence of overhead lines or if the tree is causing sidewalk damage can be included in an inventory. Tree inventories allow a community to determine the value of individual trees or the entire community forest. They aid in planting plans, engineering, help in identifying planting spaces, and allow us to diversify the species of trees growing in the community. With the rapid expansion of communities participating in Idaho's Community Forest Program, many are acknowledging the need for a tree inventory to allow them to manage the valuable resource that trees provide.

When planning the type of tree inventory that will be the most beneficial to your community there are some things to consider. First, it's important to determine program needs versus program wants when determining what information will be collected. Too much data can be collected that could complicate the inventory and make it hard to understand and update. Second, only qualified people should perform tree inventory data collection. Remember the important acronym, GIGO (Garbage In, Garbage Out). Volunteers may have problems with accuracy, will require training time, and may not maintain interest in the project. Data collection with existing community forestry staff will be more accurate, they will be able to use the equipment necessary, will be more consistent, and will become more aware of the problems that exist in the community forest. However, they typically have many other responsibilities that require attention, which sometimes doesn't leave much time for the inventory. A qualified consulting firm that performs tree inventories is the most accurate way to complete the work. They don't require training, are up to date on industry standards but are more expensive than doing the work in-house. Typically, consultant inventories will cost between \$2.50 to \$5.00 per tree. Therefore, tree inventories can be expensive to develop and because trees grow, or are removed and replaced, will require regular updates and maintenance, or they soon become obsolete. In some communities, tree inventories may be something that managers feel they don't necessarily want or need.

A useful alternative to a tree inventory is a *management needs survey*. This survey is an overview of the activities and tools necessary to maintain a healthy urban forest. It can be completed quickly and easily with existing staff, and be easier to update than a complete tree inventory. The management needs survey is a tool that is tailored to an individual community's programs and requirements. It should address both tree health and tree problems. The survey looks at overall tree health, determines what current insect and disease problems exist, ratios of over mature trees to young ones, identifies hazardous trees, trees that present clearance problems for utilities or traffic, and trees that need to be removed. Individual trees are sometimes not considered, but are looked at in groups or regions allowing managers to schedule work to be done in those groups or regions of the city and not waste time working all over town. It allows a community to get to the trees they own on a regular inspection and maintenance basis, possibly receiving attention on an average of five to ten years. Insect and disease cycles can be determined and prepared for, enabling the community forester to be ready with the

appropriate chemical or control measure. As new plantings are created, they can be incorporated into the maintenance schedule and structurally pruned on a regular basis which will minimize maintenance requirements in the future.

To develop a management needs survey, determine what assets are available to the community forestry program. Inventory what equipment is available or needed to perform maintenance tasks. Remember that infrequently used equipment can be rented or services hired rather than spending dollars that could be utilized to better advantage. Determine a diameter at breast height average (DBH). If most trees in an area are over 30 inches, a major under-planting project may be necessary. If trees are mostly 3 inches, plan on a structural pruning program. Put in place plans to protect the critical root zones of mature trees that will minimize damage during construction or utility work. Prioritize and implement work necessary to ensure proper tree health. In most towns, community forestry programs have to beg and borrow to complete the tasks in their forestry work plans. Many city councils are just beginning to recognize the need for funding of community forestry programs and the work necessary for proper tree health. Generally, there are three categories of municipal tree work necessary to maintain a healthy community forest.

- Emergency Work – generally a response to storms, vandalism, accidents, etc.
- Hot Spots – responding to citizens' requests, political demands, etc.
- Systematic – regular maintenance that addresses current problems and helps to avoid future ones.

Emergency work and responding to hot spots are reactionary activities and cannot be easily scheduled or planned for. They have to be addressed when the problem arises. Systematic work on the other hand, is regular, scheduled work and needs to be a main component of any community forestry work plan. The development of the work plan should use the management needs survey as a guide for all maintenance activity.

As Idaho communities develop new planting projects, they need to be aware of the maintenance obligation they are creating. New trees, parks, roads, sidewalks, neighborhoods or other developments are part of the community infrastructure and all have requirements for some kind of maintenance. Minimizing the economic impact of that obligation while maximizing the desired benefit of project itself is essential to its success. Trees offer many benefits to our communities. Understanding and planning for their management needs will optimize the return they give on their investment.