

## **Taking Care of Napa's Trees**

*By Chris Benz*

Trees are one of nature's most effective tools to make cities more climate resilient. Not only do they remove carbon dioxide from the air, but they also provide shade, cooling pavements and homes, and curbing the "urban heat island" effect. Trees also intercept stormwater and reduce runoff by capturing and storing rainfall in their canopy and releasing water into the atmosphere.

Jeff Gittings, Parks and Urban Forestry Manager for the City of Napa, is in charge of developing Napa's Urban Forestry Management Plan. The "urban forest" refers to public and private trees in an urban area. The Plan will benchmark the city's urban forest and provide direction for tree care and preservation over the next forty years.

Gittings learned about trees literally from the ground up. Starting out as a soils engineer, he shifted to working on parks projects for the City of Petaluma's public works department.

"I fell in love with the parks work and transferred to that department," he said. "I really learned about trees and tree care on the job, from the arborists and consultants I worked with, along with folks who loved trees and wanted to preserve them."

Research is now documenting how trees reduce air pollution and improve public health. A new study by the University of Southern California showed trees in mid-city Los Angeles absorb up to 60% of carbon dioxide emissions during spring and summer.

The Nature Conservancy reported that their Green Heart project in Louisville, Kentucky –where 8,000 trees were planted across a 4-square mile area – resulted in significantly lower levels of a blood marker known as C-reactive protein (an inflammation indicator) in study participants.

The first step in developing Napa's Urban Forestry Management Plan was creating an inventory of "community trees" – trees in the planter strip between the sidewalk and street and on other city properties. About 35,000 trees were counted. This survey didn't include trees on private land or in open space parks and stream corridors. However, it provided a good starting point for evaluating the overall status and health of Napa's urban forest.

"From looking at the data, we learned that the tree canopy covers 21.5% of the acreage within the city limits," said Gittings. "Seventy-five percent of this coverage is provided by trees growing on private property, so the Plan will include strategies for working with property owners to maintain and expand this part of the tree resource."

The inventory noted tree species, condition, location, and age estimated by trunk diameter. Three species represent over 36% of Napa's community tree population:

crepe myrtle, coast live oak, and Chinese pistache. The age range is relatively young; however, this will allow for continual canopy coverage as older trees die out.

“Tree selection needs to be looked at through multiple lenses. The Master Street Tree list will be reviewed as part of the Plan,” Gittings explained. “We want trees that do well in Napa’s climate, that don’t have problems with root growth or falling limbs. But we also want a diverse forest to protect against pests and diseases. We’d like to have no more than 10% of the urban forest be any one species, so that if one species of tree is killed by a pest, most of the forest will remain.”

Gitting’s staff plants 200 trees per year on average, including replacing trees removed during street repaving and reconstruction. For the Coombs Street reconstruction project coming this summer, the City will look to take advantage of such opportunities.

“When we replant, we talk with the property owner about what tree they want in front of their home or business,” he said. “This creates diversity in trees lining the corridor.”

Gittings expects to present the first draft of the Plan later this spring.

“One of my biggest goals is to make the work we do more efficient and to have that work provide the biggest benefit to the community and the forest itself,” he said.

Actions you can take:

1. Keep up with the Plan at <https://www.cityofnapa.org/1331/Urban-Forestry-Management-Plan-Plan-de-G>.
2. Report tree problems (such as fallen limbs): <https://www.cityofnapa.org/277/Service-Center>.

Chris Benz is a retired winemaker and co-founder of Napa Climate NOW!

Napa Climate NOW! is a local nonprofit citizens’ group advocating for smart climate solutions based on the latest climate science, part of 350 Bay Area.  
Info, [napa.350bayarea.org](http://napa.350bayarea.org)

Photo caption: Jeff Gittings, City of Napa Parks & Urban Forestry Manager, with a camphor tree protected by sidewalk and curb bulb-outs.



Photo credit: Chris Benz

