

Urban Tree Canopy

Frank Rodgers

Urban tree canopy, UTC, is an important measurement of watershed health. “Urban” trees are the trees we live with day to day. They are the trees in our towns, at schools, in parks and along the road right of way. Much like forests and forest patches, urban trees also reduce stormwater pollution runoff and help keep our streams cooler. UTC, because it is the tree canopy closest to us every day, provides many benefits. Studies have shown that a tree lined street will draw more shoppers and that they will linger and shop longer. Trees around schools have been shown to reduce asthma rates in children.

Because UTC is so important the Chesapeake Bay Program encourages each state, including West Virginia, to “complete an assessment of urban forests, adopt a local goal to increase urban tree canopy and encourage measures to attain the established goal”. In 2008 the WV Trib Team began looking for approaches to assess WV’s UTC. Jefferson County has become the first WV county to complete a detailed UTC assessment. Depending on how a municipality is defined, Pennsylvania has townships for example, there are between 150 and 200 “counties” within the Chesapeake Bay watershed. The large cities of Baltimore and Washington have assessed their UTC. Several dozen smaller cities and towns like Leesburg, Cumberland have completed their UTC assessment. Jefferson County is one of only eight counties in the whole region to have completed a full county-wide assessment. Additionally, because Jefferson’s UTC assessment was completed by the USDA Forest Service and the University of Vermont using a new technique, it is more accurate than previous assessments.

Jefferson County’s assessment is the largest of its kind. A county-wide assessment that is more than 97% accurate has never been accomplished in the U.S. and perhaps nowhere in the world. Most assessments are 70%-80% accurate. The assessment in Jefferson detected individual trees, many less than three feet wide. In June, Jennifer Brockman, Director of Jefferson County Planning & Zoning, presented the finding at the annual Potomac Watershed Partnership Summer Information Exchange. Municipal planners and watershed leaders from Southern Maryland to Central Pennsylvania were on hand to learn about WV’s accomplishment.

In the coming months Jefferson County and the communities of Bolivar, Charles Town, Harpers Ferry, Ranson, and Shepherdstown expect to adopt UTC goals and make plans to expand the cover and improve the health of the urban trees in their communities. Thanks to a new federal grant from the USDA Forest Service the WV Potomac Trib Team can continue our work. WV Division of Forestry’s Urban Forester & Chesapeake Bay Forester, WV Conservation Agencies Project CommuniTree, Cacapon Institute, and others will be able to help Jefferson complete their work and help other communities get started on their UTC assessment and enhancement projects.

For more on WV DOF’s Urban Forestry Program visit: <http://www.wvforestry.com/urban.cfm>

Learn more about CommuniTree at: <http://www.wvca.us/bay/communitree.cfm>

Read the Jefferson County UTC Plan (draft) at:

http://www.wvca.us/bay/files/bay_resources_urban/234_UTC_Plan_Public_Review_DRAFT.pdf

See the Jefferson County UTC map online at:

<http://www.uvm.edu/~joneildu/GM/JeffersonCounty/LandCover/gmviewer.html>