

DRAFT DRAFT DRAFT

Lake County Urban and Community Forest Strategic Plan

NOVEMBER 2025



LakeCounty

Prepared for:

City of Lake County
Department of Parks & Recreation
245 State Street SE
Lake County, MI 49503



Prepared by:

Davey Resource Group, Inc.
295 South Water Street, Suite 300
Kent, Ohio 44240

Table of Contents

6	Executive Summary	
7	What Do We Have?	
8	What Do We Want?	
10	How Do We Get There?	
10	How Are We Doing?	
11	Introduction	
12	What is an Urban Forestry Strategic Plan?	
13	Urban Forestry in Lake County	
16	Why Trees are Important to Lake County	
19	Planning for the Future	
20	Chapter 1: What Do We Have?	
20	Lake County's Tree Canopy	
30	Ecosystem Benefits	
31	Tree Census	
34	Priority Planting Analysis	
39	Chapter 2: What Do We Want?	
40	Engagement Activities	
40	What We Heard	
46	Vision and Goals	
48	Chapter 3: How Do We Get There?	
50	Strategic Priority 1: Collaborate	
55	Strategic Priority 2: Plant	
60	Strategic Priority 3: Cultivate	
68	Strategic Priority 4: Train	
73	Strategic Priority 5: Educate	
79	Working with Existing Programs and Partnerships	
79	Urban Forestry Funding Opportunities	
81	Chapter 4: How Are We Doing?	
81	Measuring Success and Key Performance Indicators	
85	Plan Review, Progress Reporting, and Adaptive Management	
87	Appendix A: Glossary;	
89	Appendix B: References;	
92	Appendix C: Urban Forest Stakeholders & Programs	

Acknowledgements

Lake County Project Team

Robin Grooms, Sustainability Programs Manager
RuthAnne Hall, Assistant County Administrator
Taylor Gendel, Senior Planner
Anna Niedzinski, Stormwater Coordinator
Sharene Gould Dulabaum, Water Resources Professional

Steering Committee

Dani Abboud, Brushwood Center
Tiffany Becker, Lake County
Melanie Bromberek, College of Lake County
James Fitzgerald, Lake County
Mary Fortmann, Openlands
Melissa Grycan, Illinois Department of Natural Resources
Steven Panos, Youth Conservation Corps
Katie Piotrowska, Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning
Laura Reilly, Chicago Wilderness Alliance
Rebekah Snyder, Lake County Forest Preserve District
Zachary Wirtz, The Morton Arboretum's Chicago Region Trees Initiative (CRTI)



DRAFT DRAFT DRAFT

DRAFT DRAFT DRAFT

Executive Summary

In November 2024, Lake County launched a comprehensive effort to strengthen and sustain its urban forest, beginning with the development of this *Urban and Community Forestry Strategic Plan*. This plan builds on the foundation laid by the Lake County Tree Initiative, a tree-planting and partnership program to address ecological, social, and equity concerns across Lake County.

In alignment with the Lake County Strategic Plan, the Morton Arboretum's CRTI Master Plan 2050, and other guiding documents, the Lake County *Urban and Community Forestry Strategic Plan* provides the 10-year strategy needed to grow a healthier, more diverse, and more equitable urban forest. While this plan is not an operational manual nor a specific strategy for tree care and maintenance, the Plan does provide a shared framework for advancing urban forestry action in Lake County and is designed to guide collective efforts among municipalities, park districts, nonprofit partners, and community members. Through a 12-month planning process, forest conditions were assessed, and input was gathered from community members and leaders across the green industry. This produced clear goals and measurable performance indicators to guide Lake County and its partners in ensuring that the benefits of trees are shared by all communities well into the future.

What Do We Have?

Lake County’s urban and community forest is comprised of all trees and green spaces in yards, along streets, in parks, schoolyards, and natural areas. It is a vital, valuable asset that contributes directly to the County’s environmental quality, resilience, and quality of life. Baseline conditions of trees in the County were established using recent aerial canopy data, regional tree inventory information from the Morton Arboretum’s 2020 Chicago Region Tree Census, and i-Tree Eco analysis of ecosystem services.

Tree canopy cover, and other land cover types, are not distributed uniformly across the county.

Average tree canopy was trending upward, increasing 8% between 2010 and 2017, adding 7,582 acres of canopy. However, canopy gains and losses vary locally, influenced by development, land use and conversion, and natural change.

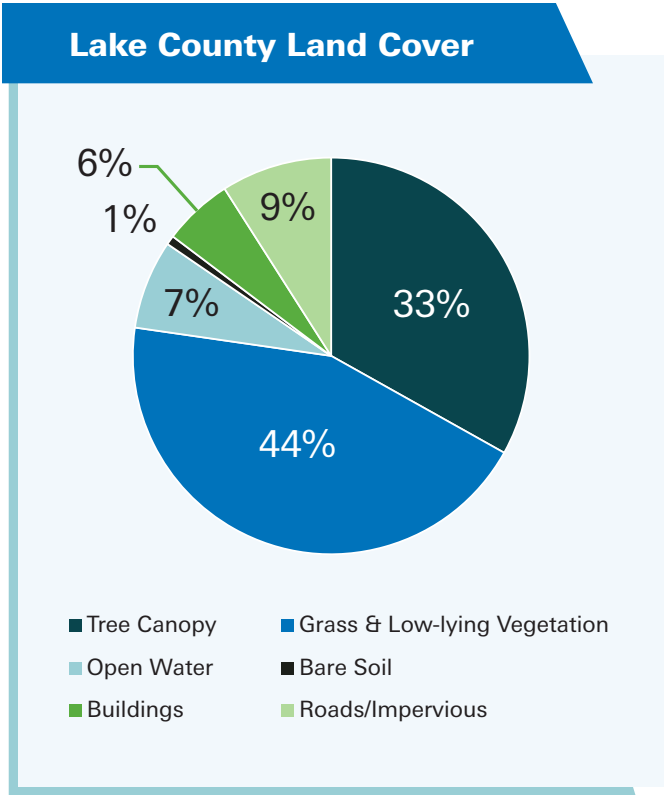


Chart 1. Tree canopy covers one-third of Lake County’s total land area.

Annual Impact of Trees in Lake County

Lake County’s trees provide measurable environmental services that contribute to cleaner air, reduced stormwater runoff, and energy savings. Every year, the trees in Lake County:

1 billion gallons

Intercept more than one billion gallons of stormwater

5,750,000 lbs.

Remove over 5,750,000 lbs. of air pollutants

133,000 tons

Absorb 133,000 tons of carbon

\$76.7 million

Are collectively worth over \$76.7 million in annual ecosystem value

According to data from the Morton Arboretum, Lake County is home to 8.8 million trees, however, over half of those are likely to be European buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*), a non-native invasive species that provides limited ecological value. While European buckthorn is an influential component of Lake County’s urban and community forest, it contributes a relatively limited share of the County’s overall tree canopy and provides less valuable ecosystem services than trees native to the area.

A Countywide priority planting analysis identified approximately 85,829 acres of potential tree planting area in Lake County, primarily on grass, vegetation, or bare soil where trees would not conflict with other land uses. High-priority sites include:

- 17,035 acres to maximize stormwater capture
- 39,254 acres to maximize urban heat reduction
- 27,534 acres where added canopy could improve conditions for vulnerable or underserved populations
- 31,904 acres where new canopy would most advance combined environmental, social, and human health goals.

What Do We Want?

An eleven-member Steering Committee representing County departments, community groups, academic institutions, and non-profit organizations guided development of the *Urban and Community Forestry Strategic Plan*. The Committee met regularly throughout the planning process to review draft materials, ensure equitable community engagement, and provide local insight on canopy conditions, goals, and priorities.

Stakeholder Engagement Summary

6 stakeholder focus groups

20 different local government entities, academic institutions, and nonprofit and private sector organizations represented

2 one-on-one stakeholder interviews

Key themes that emerged included:

- County-level coordination and leadership.
- Sustainable funding and workforce development.
- Increased public awareness of tree benefits.
- Stronger tree preservation practices.
- Expanded planting and tree maintenance in low-canopy and underserved areas.

Community Survey Summary

Offered in **2** languages, English and Spanish.

464 responses.

43 zip codes represented.

90% of survey respondents said it is important to have more trees in their community.



In August 2025, about 50 community members participated in a public meeting and a community gathering to provide direct feedback on the draft plan. Participants emphasized the need for tree planting and education programs, especially in underserved neighborhoods, as well as training and incentives for professionals working in the urban forestry, arboriculture, landscape ecology, and natural resources fields. Other priorities included countywide tree-preservation guidance, public education on invasive species, and expanded support for municipal forestry efforts.

Through conversations with the community and stakeholders, a shared vision and goals for the Lake County *Urban and Community Forestry Strategic Plan* emerged. As part of this vision, the Plan establishes a tree canopy expansion target of 35% countywide, a two percent increase, and supports municipalities to set and pursue canopy cover goals—such as reaching 30% canopy by 2040—aligned with their local context and capacity, with regional support and coordination.

Vision and Goals

Vision

Support a thriving, connected tree canopy that brings lasting value and resilience to all in Lake County.

Goal 1

Plant and care for trees to grow a healthier and accessible urban forest.

Goal 2

Collaborate to protect the urban forest.

Goal 3

Support and inspire communities to value trees.

How Do We Get There?

The vision of a *thriving, connected tree canopy that brings lasting value and resilience to all in Lake County*, is not the finish line, but a shared promise sustained through care and commitment. The three goals; plant, collaborate to protect, and support and inspire the value of trees define what needs to happen to get there. Five strategic priorities, **collaborate, plant, cultivate, train, and educate**, turn goals into focus areas, each with a set of trackable steps the County and its partners can take together that track progress towards building capacity, expanding canopy, restoring ecosystems, strengthening the workforce, and engaging residents.

Implementing the goals and strategies of the Lake County *Urban and Community Forestry Strategic Plan* will rely on the strengths of programs, institutions, and partners already active in the region. Coordinating with the active, valuable network of regional academic, nonprofit, and municipal experts in urban forestry, natural resource management, and environmental stewardship will align efforts, avoid duplication, and leverage limited resources.

Achieving the goals set out by this plan will depend on sustainable funding, including state, federal, and regional dollars. Diverse, flexible funding streams are necessary to advance environmental, health, and economic goals.

How Are We Doing?

The Lake County *Urban and Community Forestry Strategic Plan* is a living document that adapts as conditions, priorities, and opportunities evolve. Over the 10-year horizon, progress toward the five strategic priorities: Collaborate, Plant, Cultivate, Train, and Educate, will be tracked through outcome-oriented Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) on regular cycles:

- annual progress tracking to monitor metrics and milestones
- a three-year review to reassess priorities and resource alignment
- a comprehensive five-year evaluation aligned with updated canopy data

Findings will be summarized in public reports, dashboards, and public engagement opportunities to keep residents informed and involved. The KPIs serve as a framework for evaluating progress towards the five strategic priorities.

The Lake County *Urban and Community Forestry Strategic Plan* is not an endpoint, but the beginning of a continuous cycle of learning, adaptation, and shared stewardship. It is a living framework that will evolve with data, opportunities, and community insight. Responsibility and accountability toward a future where every corner of the County benefits from a thriving tree canopy, will require regular reviews, public reporting, and responsive adjustments. Through this plan, Lake County is committing to action, evaluation, and improvement that will unite partners, expand the canopy, and cultivate the knowledge, care, and collaboration needed to sustain a thriving urban forest for generations to come

Introduction

Lake County has long recognized the vital role that trees play in supporting community well-being, public health, and environmental resilience. The *Urban and Community Forestry Strategic Plan* (UCFSP) was initiated to formally investigate the state of Lake County's urban forest, identify how trees and green spaces can help address the needs of the County's communities, and understand the gaps in available resources to guide municipal partners and community members towards valuing and adopting proactive urban forestry best practices.

The County seeks to address several pressing challenges through the *Urban and Community Forestry Strategic Plan*. At the same time, Lake County has demonstrated strong momentum towards a more sustainable and resilient tree canopy. The Tree Initiative was launched in 2024 by the Board to seek a better integration of urban forestry with current operations. This Plan provides the strategic direction needed to ensure that suitable trees across Lake County become healthier, more abundant, more diverse, and more equitably distributed.

What is an Urban Forestry Strategic Plan?

An urban forestry strategic plan is built upon a comprehensive review of existing conditions, challenges, and opportunities, combined with insights from scientific research and community engagement. This plan considered multiple sources of information, including:

- Countywide and regional tree canopy data and analysis
- Stakeholder and community feedback
- Existing urban forestry and sustainability plans and projects, such as the Chicago Region Trees Initiative Master Plan 2050.
- National best practices and urban forestry programming

The Planning Process

The Urban and Community Forestry Strategic Plan was developed through a collaborative planning process initiated in December 2024 that engaged Lake County staff, and many internal and external stakeholders. Guided by the principles of adaptive management, the planning process identified current conditions (*What do we have?*; Figure 1), defined desired future outcomes (*What do we want?*), and built strategies that can evolve in response to changing needs, new data, and emerging challenges (*How do we get there?*). Adaptive management provides the flexibility to adjust implementation over time, ensuring that Lake County remains responsive to both changing environmental conditions and community priorities (*How are we doing?*).

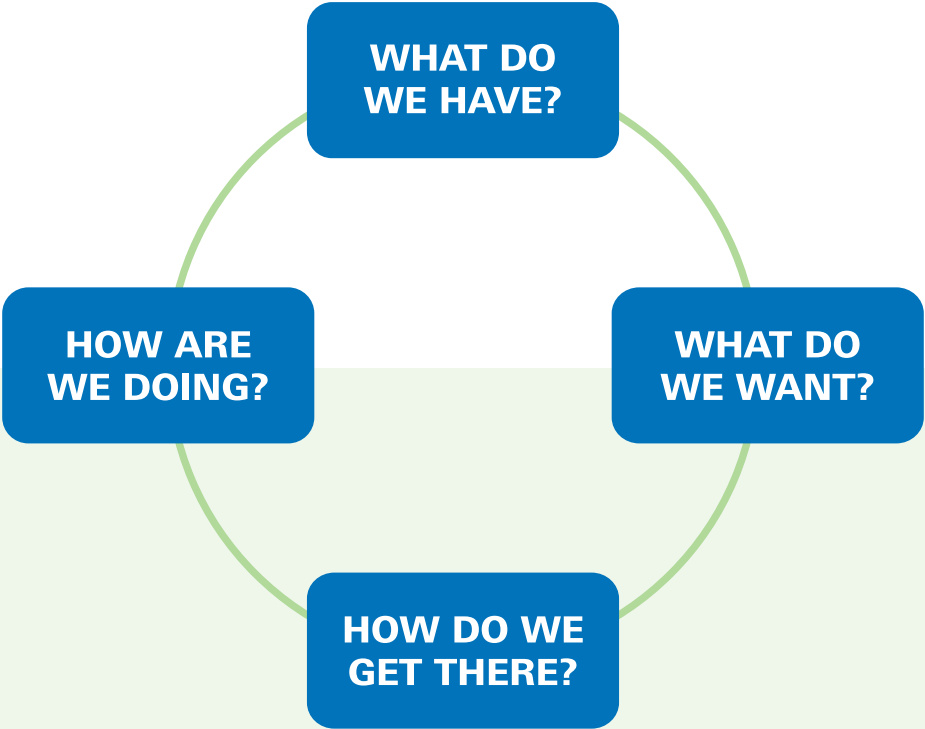


Figure 1. Adaptive Management process

Urban Forestry in Lake County

About Lake County

Lake County is located at the northern edge of the Chicago metropolitan region, along the Illinois-Wisconsin state line and the shores of Lake Michigan. The County is home to approximately 714,000 residents across 55 municipalities and unincorporated areas (U.S. Census Bureau 2025). While closely tied to one of the nation's largest urban centers, the County retains a unique green identity. Lake County residents take pride in the area's great biodiversity and ecology, with landscapes that include oak woodlands, prairies, savannas, wetlands, and coastal dunes home to thousands of unique species of living things. According to the Lake County Forest Preserve District, Lake County is home to more endangered and threatened species than any other county in Illinois (Lake County Forest Preserves 2025).

Current Tree Programs and Priorities

With about one-third of its land area shaded by trees, Lake County's urban forest is a valued resource with many advocates and invested stakeholders. Many organizations across Lake County have a stake in the health and growth of the urban forest, with several already having established programs. However, these efforts have largely taken place independently. Stakeholders emphasized the need for greater alignment and stronger partnership across organizations.

Lake County sustainability initiatives have begun to build a foundation for coordinated urban forestry action. In 2024, the County launched its Tree Initiative, investing \$2.5 million of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding to support tree planting efforts on publicly maintained and publicly accessible lands. This program, which runs through 2026, is designed to expand tree canopy to enhance local stormwater management systems and build resilience. The Tree Initiative represents the County's first large-scale, coordinated investment in urban forestry and signals a strong commitment to environmental sustainability.



DRAFT DRAFT DRAFT

These efforts, along with the *Urban and Community Forestry Strategic Plan*, align with County priorities, including climate action, stormwater management, equitable access to green space, and public health. Trees and forests play a critical role in advancing these priorities, and the *Urban and Community Forestry Strategic Plan* builds upon them by providing a framework for long-term, coordinated action that strengthens local programs while amplifying their impact at the countywide scale. Additionally, Lake County sought to align future efforts and strategies with the broader, regional vision for trees and the urban forest established by The Morton Arboretum's CRTI, an urban and community forestry program in partnership with more than 500 organizations in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors across the Chicago region driven forward by its Master Plan 2050. CRTI's overarching goals include: "Inspire people to value trees", "Increase the Chicago region's tree canopy", "Reduce threats to trees", and "Enhance oak ecosystems" (The Morton Arboretum 2020). By anchoring its strategy in these shared goals, Lake County plans to position the *Urban and Community Forestry Strategic Plan* as both a local implementation plan and a meaningful extension of regional urban forestry action.

Lake County Forest Preserve District and the Government of Lake County are separate and distinct government entities

Established in 1958 through a voter referendum, the Lake County Forest Preserve District (LCFPD) operates as a separate taxing authority under the Downstate Forest Preserve District Act. It is governed by a 19-member elected board, with members concurrently serving on the Lake County Board, yet the two bodies operate independently. While the Forest Preserve District manages over 31,000 acres of natural land, parks, and trails, Lake County oversees broader governmental functions such as public health, transportation, and countywide sustainability initiatives.



DRAFT DRAFT DRAFT

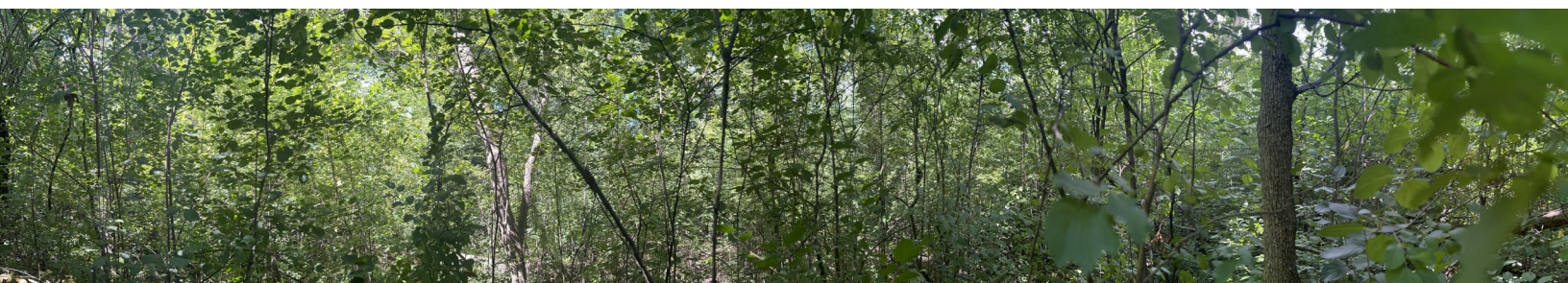
Considerations for the Future

In the coming years, Lake County's urban forest will face challenges, familiar and new. This plan aims to increase the urban forest's resilience in the face of these challenges.

Climate change and severe weather

Climate change is expected to bring:

- **More frequent and severe heat events:** By the end of the century, Northern Illinois could experience a greater number of consecutive days above 95 degrees Fahrenheit (Wuebbles et al. 2021). High daytime temperatures combined with high humidity can result in heat-related illness and risks to human health, particularly to vulnerable populations like children, the elderly, and the chronically ill (Ford 2021).
- **Changes in precipitation patterns:** "Illinois is expected to see an overall increase in precipitation in the coming decades as the climate warms, with larger increases in the north compared to the south." (Wuebbles et al. 2021).
- **Higher intensity storm events:** Future projections suggest continued increases in overall rainfall paired with more intense downpours and longer dry periods, raising risks of flooding, drought, and stormwater system failures (Ford 2021).
- **Alterations in both suitable habitat and hardiness zones:** Tree species distribution ranges are likely to change, causing some species to decline, thrive, or migrate into the region in response to changes in climate. Fifteen percent of tree species currently in the Chicago region face moderate-high or high risk under future climate conditions. Species distribution modeling suggests that suitable habitat may increase or become newly suitable for 40 species, including both native and non-native species (Brandt et al. 2017).



Non-Native, Invasive Woody Plants

Non-native woody invasive species, particularly European buckthorn, are widespread in both the urban forest and natural areas of Lake County. Their presence negatively impacts native biodiversity, limits the natural regeneration of native trees, and alters soil and hydrological conditions. The Chicago Wilderness Region Urban Forest Assessment noted that many species that are more resilient to future climate conditions (low vulnerability) are non-native or invasive (Brandt et al. 2017). Developing a coordinated strategy to manage these species and support the establishment of diverse native trees would help strengthen the long-term sustainability of Lake County's forests.

Why Trees are Important to Lake County

Trees provide habitat for native wildlife

Trees offer food, shelter, and nesting sites for a wide variety of birds, mammals, and insects. They support native wildlife by contributing to a balanced ecosystem, connecting human and natural communities.

Trees provide cooling shade

The canopies of large, healthy shade trees reduce surface and air temperatures by blocking powerful sunshine and releasing water vapor into the air through evapotranspiration (Simpson and McPherson 2001). In cities and neighborhoods, this cools the air, makes outdoor spaces more comfortable, and reduces the urban heat island effect.

Trees extract pollutants from the air

Trees absorb pollutants such as ozone and particulate matter while offsetting those pollutants with oxygen produced through photosynthesis (Nowak, Crane, and Stevens 2006). Cleaner air supports respiratory health, reducing healthcare costs, and enhancing overall quality of life, especially in more urbanized or vulnerable communities.

Trees reduce flooding and divert stormwater runoff

Tree roots absorb water and their canopies intercept rainfall (Berland et al. 2017). Communities benefit from fewer flooded streets and basements, reduced strain on stormwater infrastructure, and improved water quality within area lakes, rivers, and streams.

Trees improve mental and physical health

Proximity to trees and longer durations of time spent in green spaces helps to lower stress, improve mood, and encourage outdoor recreation, like walking or cycling (Wolf, Krueger, Rozance 2014). These benefits not only improve community health outcomes, but also reduce healthcare burdens, and foster a stronger sense of well-being and community.



Trees can help reduce noise from roads or highways

Dense tree belts buffer and scatter sound from traffic and industry (Fang and Ling 2005). Quieter environments enhance livability, making neighborhoods more peaceful and less disruptive.

Trees add to property values

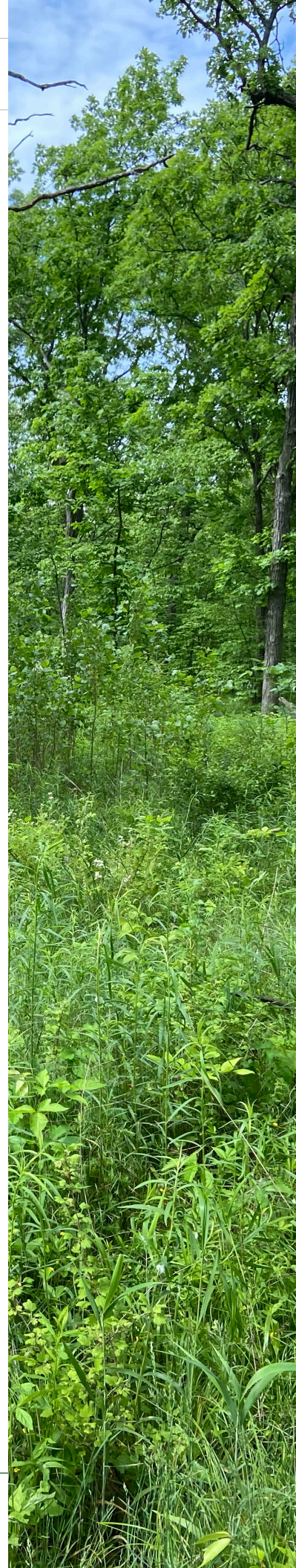
Homes shaded by trees or located on tree-lined streets are consistently valued higher in the real estate market, not only benefiting individual homeowners but also the overall economic vitality of the community. A well-maintained street tree can add 3-15% in added value to a home (Johnson, Koski, and O'Conner 2017).

Trees make neighborhoods safer and more enjoyable

Street trees narrow the visual field of drivers and create a sense of enclosure, encouraging slower, safer driving. Studies show that street trees may also make biking routes more enjoyable and help improve a city's overall livability (Nawrath, Kowarik, and Fischer 2019).

Trees reduce energy costs

Trees strategically planted around buildings provide shade in the summer and act as windbreaks in the winter, lowering the demand for heating and cooling. Trees can save up to 25% of the energy a home uses, reducing utility bills, cutting greenhouse gas emissions, and making communities more resilient to rising energy costs (Department of Energy 2025).





In a countywide survey, community members identified wildlife habitat, cooling shade from tree canopies, and the ability of trees to absorb pollutants and improve air quality as top benefits (Figure 2).

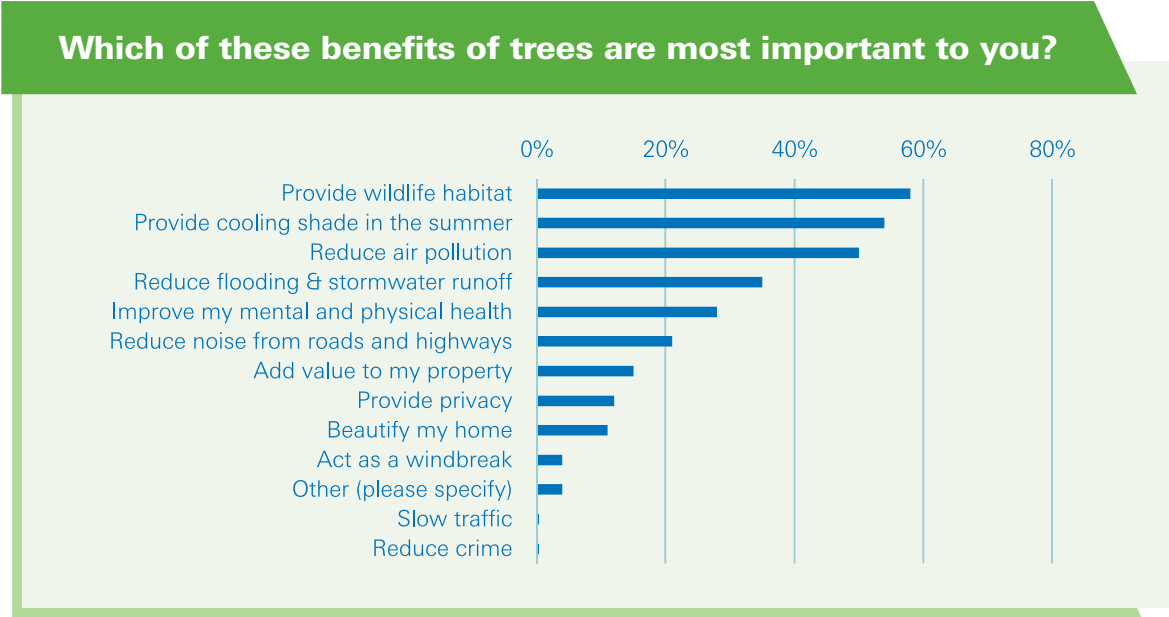


Figure 2. Top tree benefits in Lake County based on 464 responses to a community survey. Respondents could choose up to three benefits.

Planning for the Future

The need for a countywide strategy arises from both the challenges and the opportunities present today. With a clear strategy in place, Lake County can build regional resilience through promoting biodiversity in the urban forest, supporting municipal partners, and inspiring the community to value the urban forest for the myriad social, environmental, and economic benefits they provide.

How to Use This Plan

The *Urban and Community Forestry Strategic Plan* is not an operational manual, nor does it prescribe specific management practices for entities that manage trees. Instead, the *Urban and Community Forestry Strategic Plan* provides a shared framework for advancing urban forestry action in Lake County and is designed to guide collective efforts among municipalities, park districts, non-profit partners and community members toward the long-term goal of cultivating a healthier, more connected, and more resilient urban forest. Through the implementation of this plan, Lake County will play a role as a regional convener, strategic funding partner, technical and administrative resource, community activator, and workforce incubator.

The following chapters of the *Urban and Community Forestry Strategic Plan* outline the findings and outcomes of the adaptive management planning process. “What do we have?” outlines the current state of Lake County’s urban forest and research into national best practices and model urban forestry programming (see Chapter 1). “What do we want?” presents findings from a robust stakeholder and community engagement process and outcomes of that process in the form of a vision statement and a set of goals to drive regional urban forestry action over the next 10 years (see Chapter 2). “How do we get there?” and “How are we doing?” provide the strategic priorities and key action, considerations, and metrics that will guide implementation of the Plan and evaluate progress (see Chapter 3; and Chapter 4).

Chapter 1: **What Do We Have?**

Lake County's urban forest encompasses all trees and green spaces - yards, streets, parks, schoolyards, and natural areas. Together, these trees form a living system that cools neighborhoods, cleans the air, reduces flooding, supports wildlife, and enriches community health and wellbeing.

The forest is constantly changing. Some changes are subtle and occur over decades as trees grow, mature, and eventually decline (Dwyer and Nowak 2000). Others happen quickly through planting programs, invasive species removal, or disruptive events like storms, disease, or pest outbreaks.

This chapter offers a snapshot in time of Lake County's tree canopy – its extent, benefits, and challenges.

Lake County's Tree Canopy

As part of the investigation into Lake County's urban forest, Davey Resource Group, Inc. (DRG) analyzed the 2010 and 2017 land cover and urban tree canopy (UTC) assessments of Lake County, Illinois originally conducted by The Morton Arboretum's CRTI program, USDA, and the University of Vermont. DRG utilized this high-level analysis of Lake County's urban forest to further detail canopy change countywide, uncovering where change is occurring on the ground and identifying planting locations that address the top priorities of Lake County's sustainability programs.

Land Cover

The land cover analysis used seven classifications to describe the total 301,314 acres of land area in Lake County, IL (Table 1, Map 1).

Land Cover Class	Acres	Percent of County Area
Grass/low-lying Vegetation	132,248	44%
Tree Canopy	98,181	33%
Open Water	21,798	7%
Buildings	17,045	6%
Other Impervious	16,469	5%
Roads	13,101	4%
Bare Soil	2,240	1%

Table 1. Lake County Land Cover

Tree Canopy

Tree canopy is the second-largest land cover type in Lake County, covering 98,180 acres, or 33%, of the county’s total land area (Map 1). Grass and low-lying vegetation make up the largest share at 44%, with the remaining 203,134 acres occupied by other land cover types. The 132,248 acres of grass and low-lying vegetation represent potential tree-planting opportunities (see Priority Planting section).



Lake County, IL

Land Cover Classification

County Boundary

Canopy

Grass

Water

Bare Soil

Building

Road

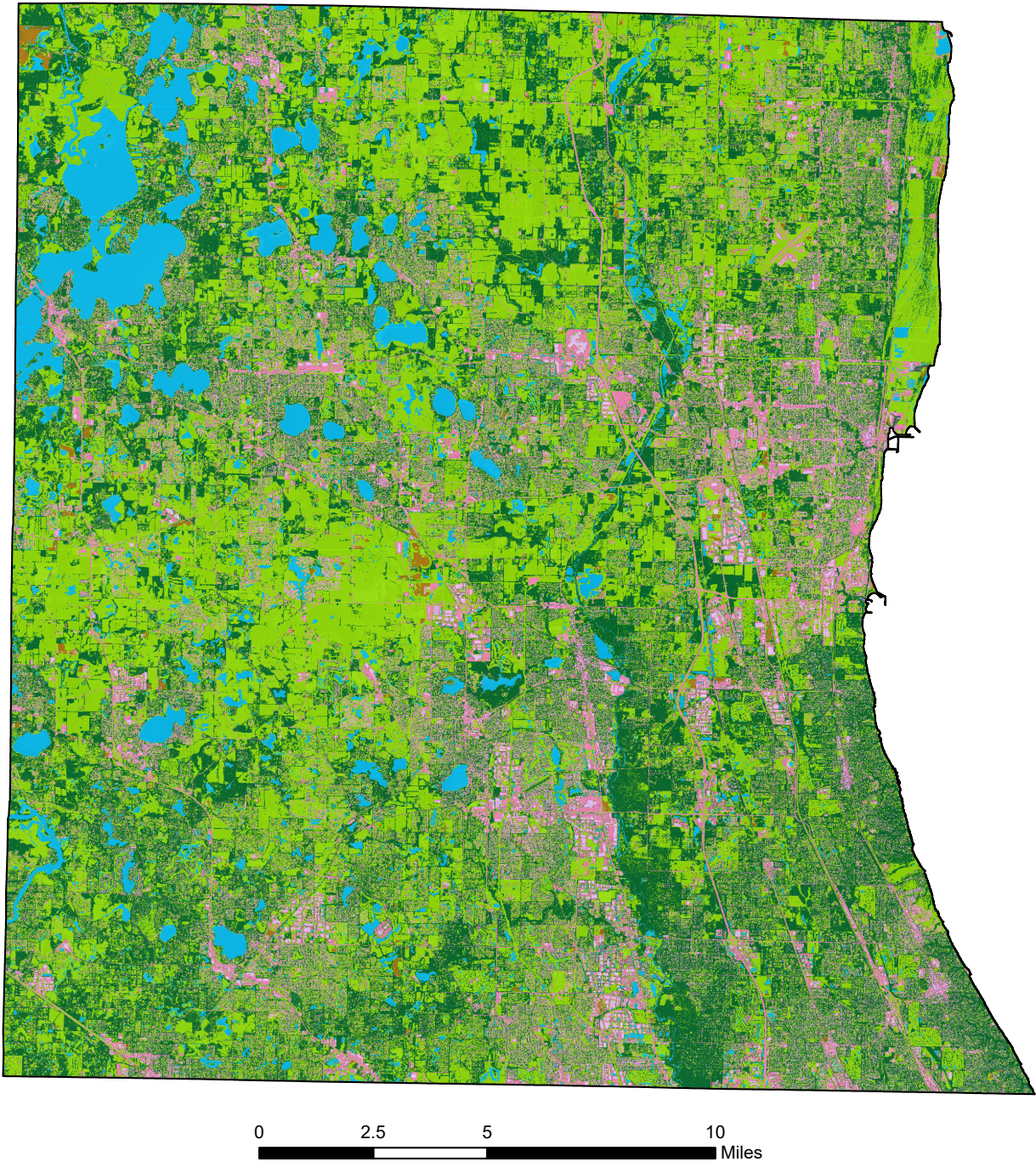
Other Impervious

N

W

E

S



Map 1. Land Cover in Lake County

Tree Canopy Change, 2010 - 2017

In 2017, tree canopy cover in Lake County comprised 98,180 acres, 33% of the total land area of the county. Between 2010 and 2017, tree canopy cover grew by 7,582 acres (+8%) which increased total tree canopy percentage from 30% in 2010 to 33% in 2017 (Table 2).

Area	Lake County
Acres	301,314
Tree Cover 2010	30%
Tree Cover 2017	33%
Possible Tree Canopy Acres	85,839
Maximum Tree Cover	61%
Change in Acres 2010-2017	7,582
Percent Change 2010-2017	8%

Table 2. Tree canopy cover and change in Lake County, 2010-2017.

A canopy change analysis offers a valuable snapshot in time, showing where canopy had increased or decreased, providing context for strategic decision making. However, it is important to note an important limitation to a UTC assessment – it cannot determine the exact causes of tree canopy or land use changes. These changes can result from a number of factors, such as:

- intentional planting
- natural regeneration
- clearing for development
- removal or infestations of invasive species
- impacts from insect pests like emerald ash borer, oak wilt, and Dutch elm disease
- natural tree mortality
- individual property owner decisions to add or remove trees

Local knowledge, field-based studies/observations, or formal tree inventories may help uncover evidence-based insights into the reasons behind canopy and land use changes.

Tree Canopy Cover and Change

Tree canopy cover within each of the County’s cities, villages, and unincorporated land throughout Lake County were analyzed (Map 2). As of 2017, seven municipalities had between 30% - 35% tree canopy coverage, roughly equal to the countywide percent canopy (33%). In contrast, 26 municipalities had below 30% canopy coverage, and 20 were above the county’s tree canopy average (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Tree canopy coverage across Lake County municipalities, 2017.

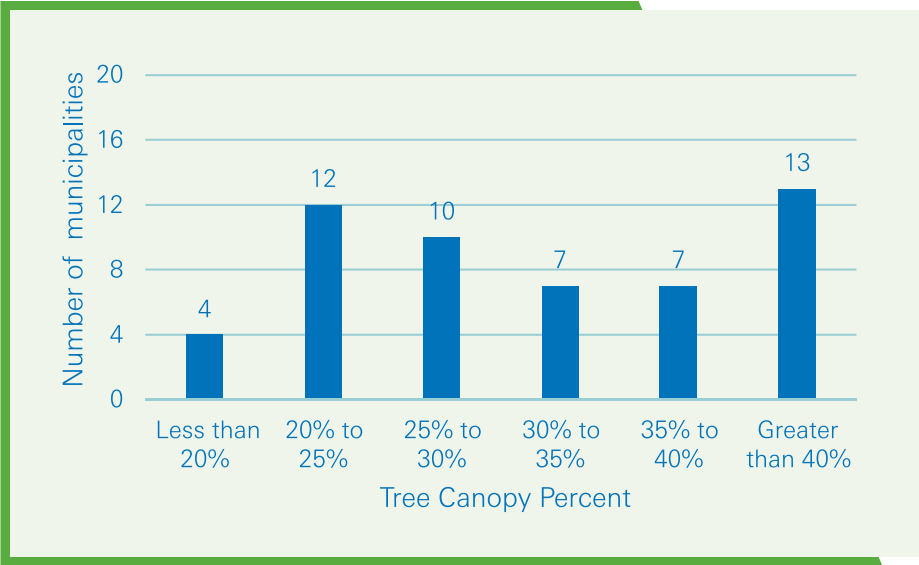
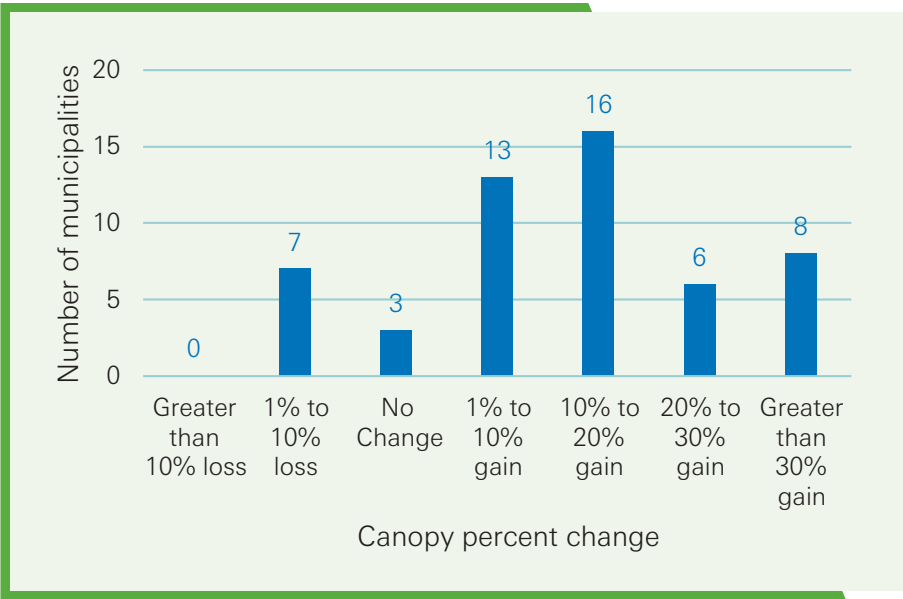


Figure 4. Tree canopy percent change across Lake County’s municipalities, 2010-2017.



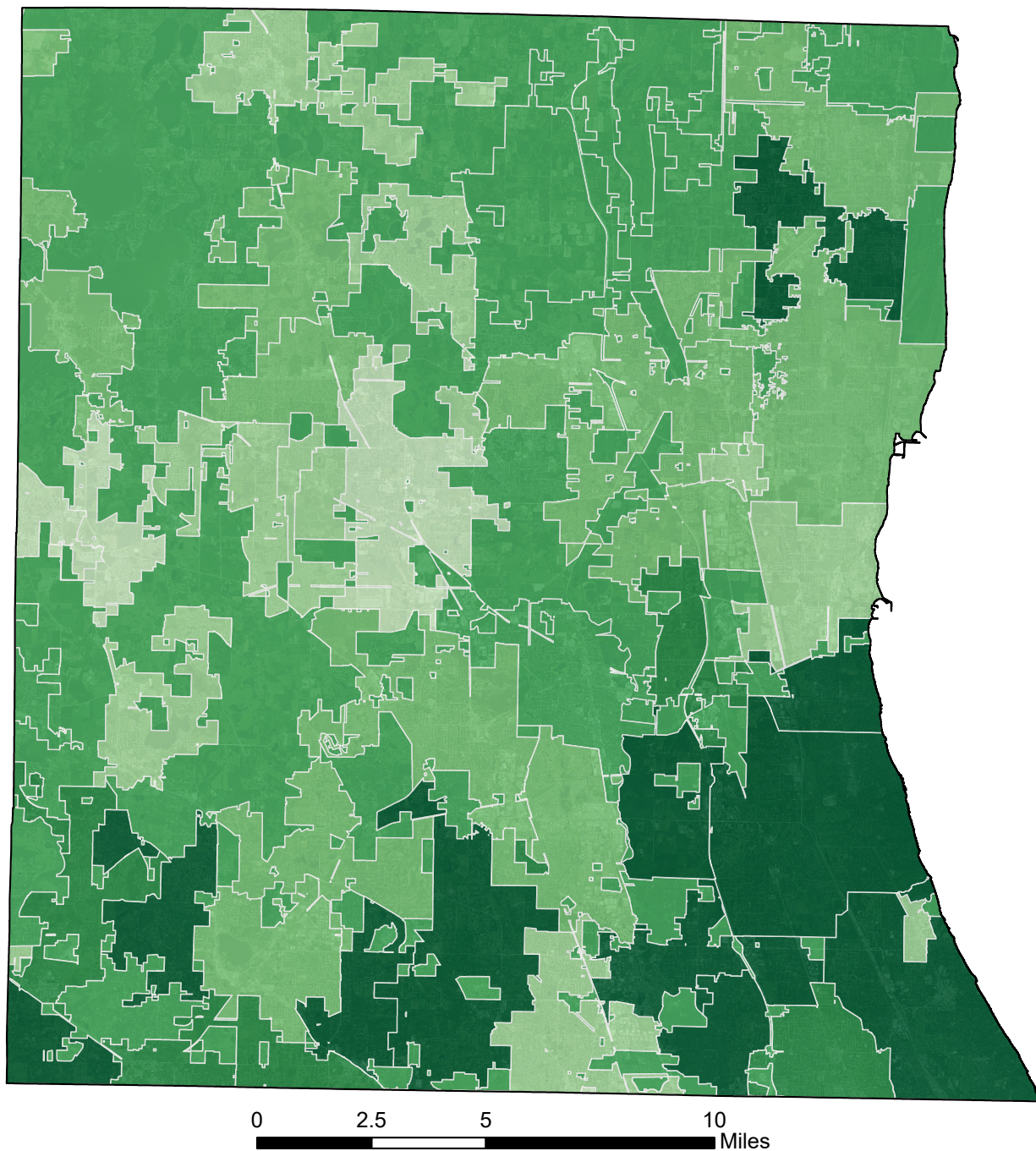
Between 2010 and 2017, 80% of Lake County municipalities gained tree canopy, while 20% experienced no significant change or a loss in tree canopy (Figure 4). The municipalities that experienced a negative change in tree canopy percent are concentrated in the southern parts of the county, along the Cook County line (Map 3).

Canopy Coverage Percent By Municipality

County Boundary

Canopy Percent

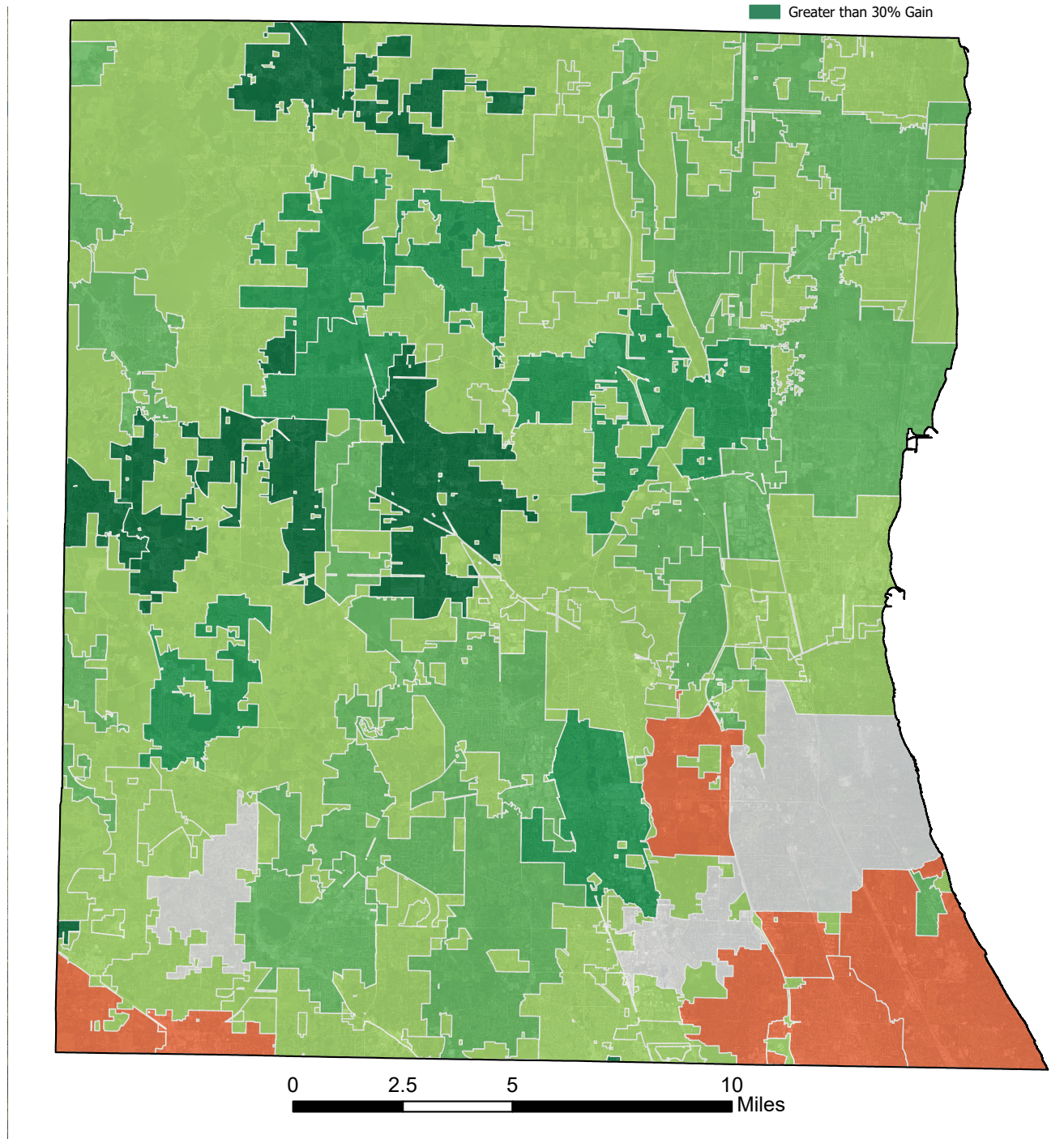
- Below 20%
- 20% to 25%
- 25% to 30%
- 30% to 35%
- 35% to 40%
- Above 40%



Map 2. Canopy cover percent by municipality, 2017.

Lake County, IL

2010 to 2017 Canopy Change Percent By Municipality



Map 3. Canopy cover change by municipality, 2017.

Tree Canopy Cover and Change by U.S. Census Block Groups

U.S. Census block groups offer a valuable framework for analyzing and comparing tree canopy cover and its changes over time. Block groups are defined as statistical segments within a larger census tract, with each tract typically comprising several block groups. As the smallest geographic units for which the Census Bureau gathers sample data, their boundaries are shaped by population size, meaning the number of residents in each area determines the block group's boundaries.

In Lake County, there are 424 block groups. The majority of block groups, 159 out of 424 (38%), have between 30% and 40% tree canopy (Figure 5). Forty block groups (9%) have less than 20% tree canopy, while 36 block groups (8%) have greater than 50% (Figure 5); block groups with 20% or less tree canopy are dispersed throughout the county, while the block groups with 50% tree canopy or more are generally concentrated in the southeastern corner of the county (Map 4).

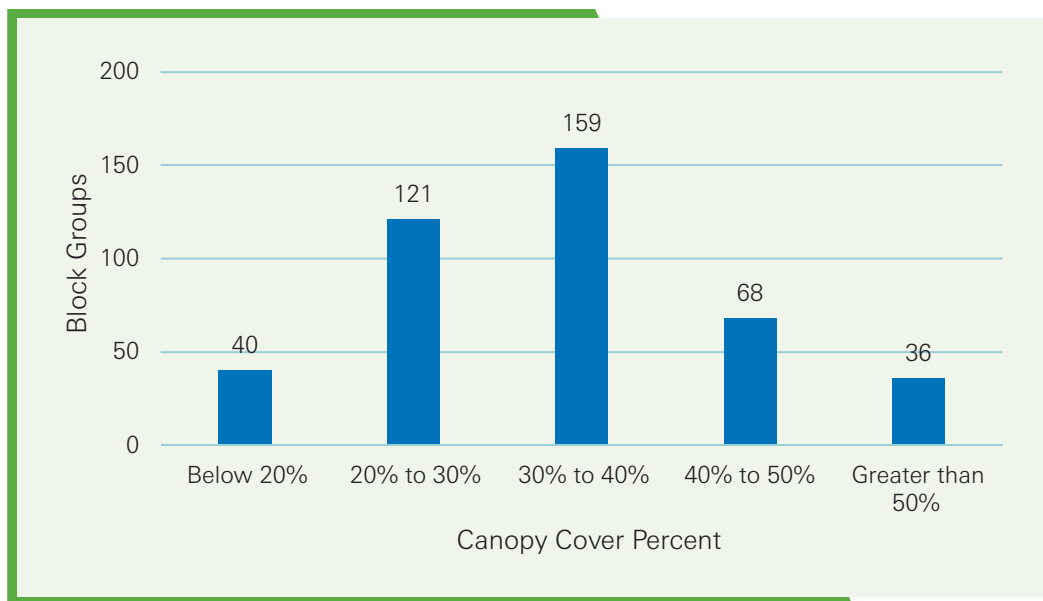


Figure 5. Canopy coverage across block groups, 2017

Urban Forest Access

Tree Equity Score is an online tool developed by American Forests that demonstrates where tree canopy is found in developed communities, and whether it is distributed fairly across areas with different demographic characteristics, such as income level, race/ethnicity, age, and health characteristics ("Methods & Data," n.d.; Figure 6).

The U.S. Census Bureau collects data about people, places, and economies at the US Census Block Group level, a small geographic unit based on populations of between 600 to 3,000 people. These small units, combined with tree canopy cover data, make it possible to compare tree cover between neighborhoods and see how factors like poverty, population density, or health disparities align with canopy levels (US Census Bureau 2022).

Tree Equity Score then combines tree canopy cover data, US Census demographics, climate information, and more, to visualize where planting trees would deliver the greatest social and environmental benefits (American Forests 2021; Figure 6).

Although Tree Equity Scores are not calculated for every part of Lake County, the areas that are scored range from **65 to 96** on a 100-point scale. Tree Equity Score can be used by Lake County's municipal partners to prioritize planting programs or by communities to help monitor their own progress towards tree equity goals.

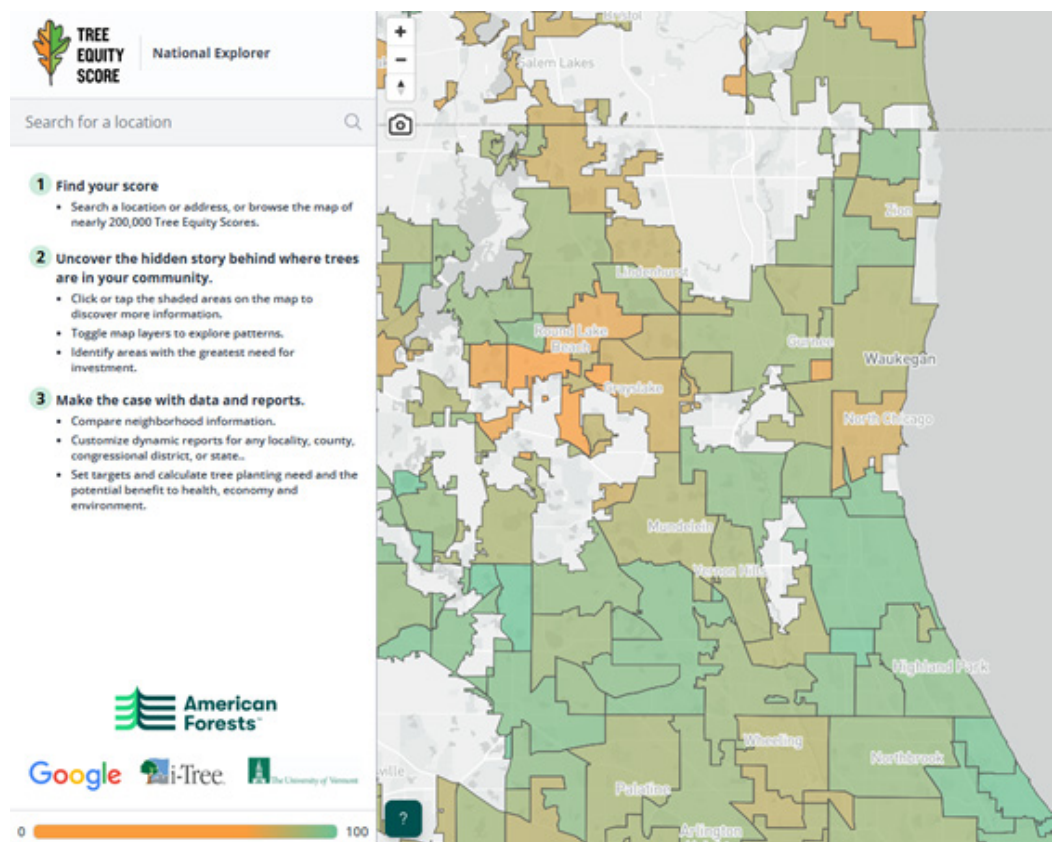
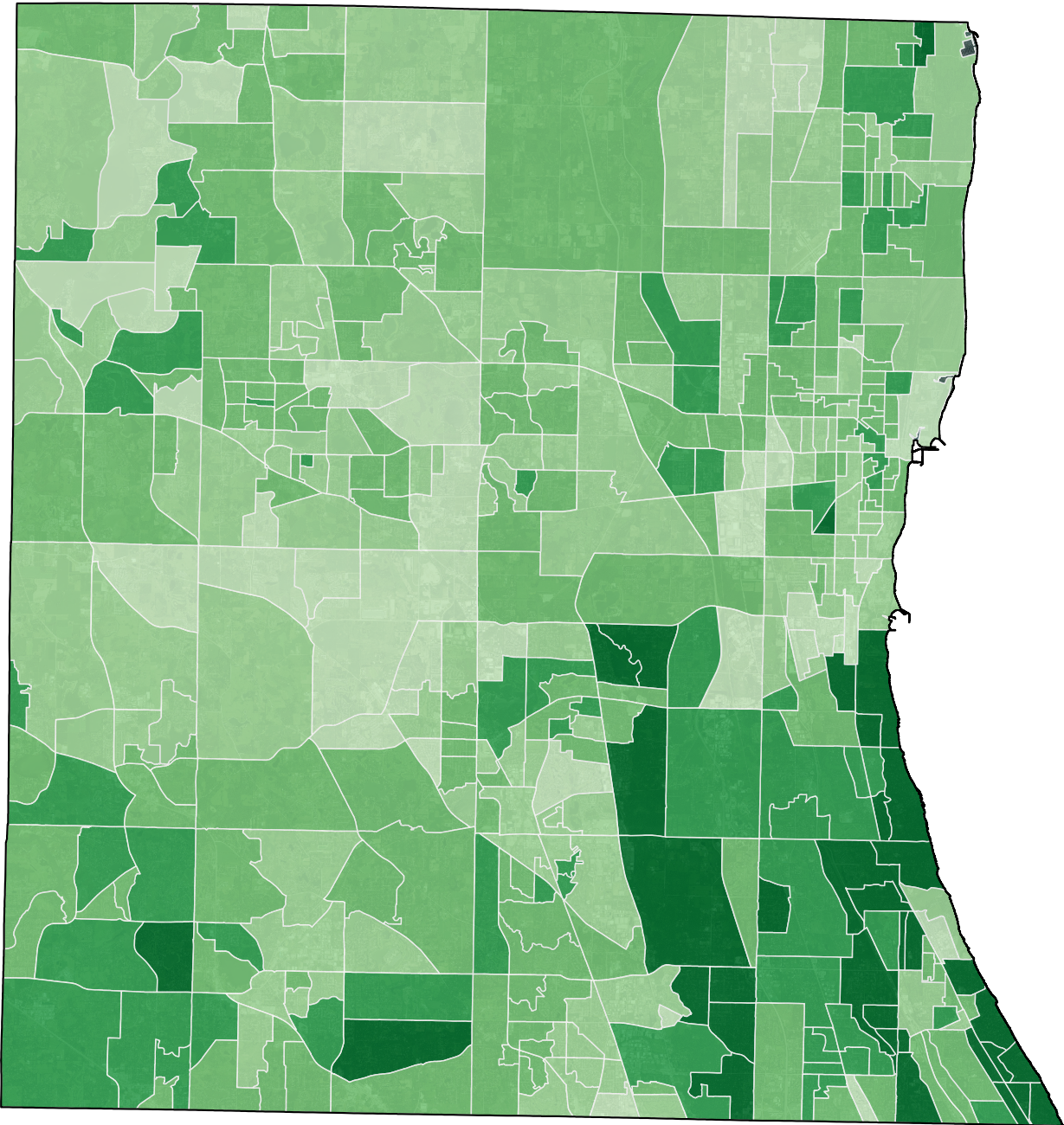


Figure 6. Tree Equity Score Map for Lake County (American Forests 2025)

Lake County, IL

Canopy Coverage Percent By Block Group

- County Boundary
- Canopy Percent
 - Below 20%
 - 20% to 30%
 - 30% to 40%
 - 40% to 50%
 - Above 50%



Map 4. Canopy cover percent by block group, 2017.

Ecosystem Benefits

The trees of Lake County play a vital role in the quality of life of residents while offering a variety of benefits. To help quantify the value of Lake County's urban tree canopy, tools like i-Tree Eco can assign dollar values to the ecosystem services trees provide, such as air pollution removal, energy savings, carbon storage, and stormwater runoff reduction. While these values are estimates, they help to communicate the tangible economic contributions of trees in Lake County.

Annual value of Lake County's Tree Canopy Benefits: \$76.7 million

In 2017, Lake County's tree cover provided a cumulative, annual value of \$76,712,468 by providing the following ecosystem benefits to the community (USDA Forest Service, i-Tree Tools, Table 3):

- **Carbon:** The trees sequestered 133,160 tons of carbon, reducing the amount returning to the atmosphere as a greenhouse gas. Annual value: \$57,621,148. Additionally, the trees stored over 3,410,980 tons of carbon, which provides an estimated benefit valued at \$1.5 billion over their lifetimes.
- **Stormwater:** The trees intercepted and absorbed about 960,720 gallons of stormwater, reducing the amount entering the storm sewer system. Annual value: \$9,256,774
- **Air pollution:** The trees removed 72,200 pounds of carbon monoxide, 609,820 pounds of nitrogen dioxide, 3,924,000 pounds of ozone, and 161,040 pounds of sulfur dioxide from the atmosphere, helping to reduce atmospheric warming, improve air quality, and mitigate the public health effects from air pollution. Annual value: \$3,060,932.
- **Air quality:** Lake County's urban forest removed 990,380 pounds of dust, smoke, and other particles from the air, directly improving air quality and respiratory health (e.g., asthma). Annual value: \$6,773,614.

Ecosystem Benefits	Quantity	Value
Annual Benefits		
Air quality: Carbon Monoxide (CO) removal (lb)	72,200	\$36,888
Air quality: Nitrogen Dioxide (NO2) removal (lb)	609,820	\$119,616
Air quality: Ozone (O3) removal (lb)	3,924,000	\$2,893,705
Air quality: Sulfur Dioxide (SO2) removal (lb)	16,469	5%
Air quality: Particulate Matter (PM2.5 & PM10) removal (lb)	990,380	\$6,773,614
Carbon sequestration (tons)	133,160	\$57,621,148
Stormwater: avoided runoff (gal)	1,035,900,000	\$9,256,774
Total Annual Benefits		\$76,712,468
Accrued Benefits		
Carbon storage (tons)	3,410,980	\$1,476,024,888
Total Benefits		\$1,552,737,356

Table 3. Ecosystem benefits provided by Lake County’s urban forest in 2017.

Tree Census

In 2010 and again in 2020, The Morton Arboretum conducted a Chicago Region Tree Census to help understand the composition of the region’s urban forest, guide management of trees across the region, and support policy and tree preservation decisions.

Each Census included the measurement and analysis of approximately 1,600 plots across the Chicago Region, the largest field study of its kind in the nation.

In 2010 and 2020, crews measured trees in approximately 1,600 randomly selected sample plots across the seven-county region, including 184 plots in Lake County (Figure 7). Each sample plot was about 75 ft in diameter, or 4,365 ft², where every tree greater than one inch in diameter was identified and measured (U.S. Forest Service 2021).



Figure 7. Project area map of the approximately 1,600 sites assessed in 2020

The data collected in the Tree Census were used to estimate the forest composition across the region. An estimated 172 million trees stand across the Chicago region. Approximately 70% of the region's trees are found on private property.

Non-Native Invasive Species in Lake County

European buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*) is the most prevalent species in Lake County accounting for nearly 53% of all trees by population, meaning that more than half of the trees recorded in the county belong to this species (Chicago Region Trees Initiative 2020, Table 4). The adaptability, reproductive vigor, and lack of natural predators of non-native invasive plant species allow them to outcompete native plants and displace native species critical for ecosystem balance. Although European buckthorn dominates the landscape by stem count, nine out of the ten most common species in Lake County are native trees (Table 4). However, because European buckthorn matures as a relatively small tree, its contribution to the overall canopy is limited, comprising only 17.3% of total leaf area, or the share of total foliage surface area contributed by European buckthorn across the entire tree population.

Common Name	Scientific Name	Native	% of Stem Count	% of Leaf Area
European Buckthorn	<i>Rhamnus cathartica</i>	No	53%	17%
Staghorn Sumac	<i>Rhus typhina</i>	Yes	4%	1%
Boxelder	<i>Acer negundo</i>	Yes	4%	10%
Eastern cottonwood	<i>Populus deltoides</i>	Yes	4%	6%
Shagbark hickory	<i>Carya ovata</i>	Yes	2%	3%
Black walnut	<i>Juglans nigra</i>	Yes	2%	5%
Black cherry	<i>Prunus serotina</i>	Yes	2%	3%
Northern red oak	<i>Quercus rubra</i>	Yes	2%	11%
White oak	<i>Quercus alba</i>	Yes	1%	5%
Silver maple	<i>Acer saccharinum</i>	Yes	1%	6%

Table 4. The ten most common species by stem count in Lake County.

Beyond biodiversity impacts, non-native invasive species influence ecosystem services. While all plants, including non-native invasive plants, contribute to air pollution mitigation, carbon storage, and oxygen production, these benefits are often modest compared to their abundance. For example, despite the prevalence of non-native invasive European buckthorn in Lake County, its ecological contributions are relatively low, sequestering only 17% of the total annual carbon despite being the most common tree in the county (Table 4). Native species, such as northern red oak (*Quercus rubra*), white oak (*Quercus alba*), and silver maple (*Acer saccharinum*) outperform invasive species in both carbon storage and structural value.

Photo 2. European buckthorn, photo credit: Leslie J. Mehrhoff, University of Connecticut, Bugwood.org.



Priority Planting Analysis

A priority planting analysis classified 85,829 acres of potential tree planting area within Lake County. Potential tree planting area was identified from land cover that is currently grass/vegetation or bare soil, removing areas where plantings might conflict with existing land uses, such as agricultural fields, major utility corridors, sports fields, and streets.

Planting all 85,829 acres of potential planting area would raise the countywide tree cover to nearly 62%. Planting this much tree canopy in Lake County is not realistic. This planting priority analysis is designed to guide decision making about how to direct limited resources for tree planting and preservation in locations where they will have the greatest public benefit.

Priority Planting Factors

Potential planting area was prioritized on a five-point scale from Very Low to Very High based on the ability for trees to benefit underserved or vulnerable populations and/or to mitigate environmental and health factors of concern in Lake County.

Environmental Priorities

- **Stormwater:** Areas where trees can intercept and reduce stormwater runoff. In Lake County, 17,035 acres of potential planting area (6% of county land area) are ranked High or Very High for capturing stormwater (Map 5).
- **Urban heat island:** Areas where trees can reduce summer temperatures through shade and evaporative cooling. Countywide, 39,254 acres (13% of county land area) rank High or Very High for reducing urban heat island (Map 6).

Social Equity Priorities

Collectively, 27,534 acres of Lake County (9% of county land area) rank High or Very High priority for tree canopy expansion to help address social and human health inequality (Map 7). The factors that were considered were:

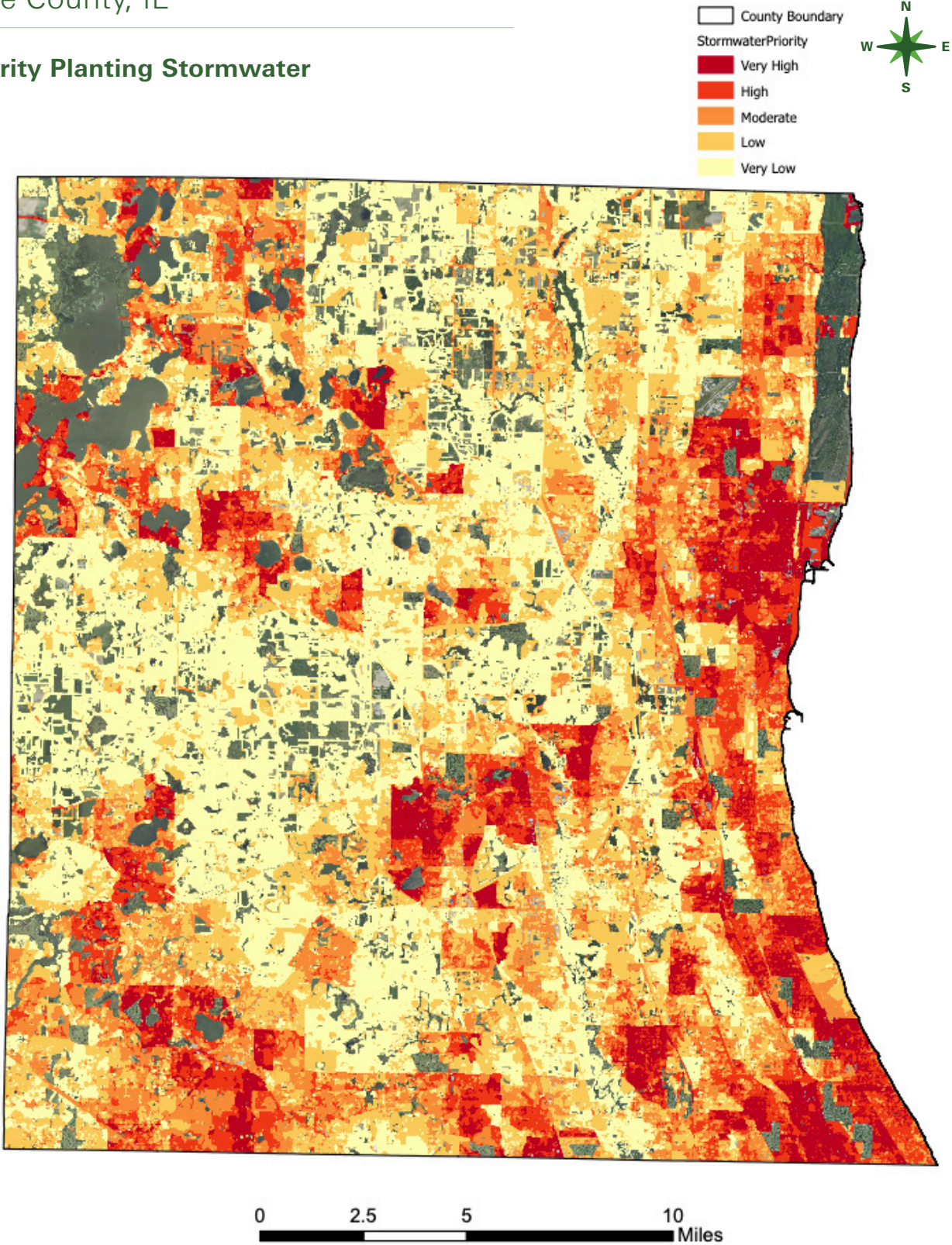
- **Population density, low median income, vulnerable age (children and seniors):** Additional trees can complement a variety of efforts that are aimed at reducing inequality.
- **Mental health, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), and asthma incidence:** Trees and urban green spaces have been shown to support human health by cleaning air, lowering stress levels and mitigating extreme heat.

Adding 1% Tree Canopy

3,013 acres equals 1% of the Lake County's land area -- about the same acreage as the entire Village of Lincolnshire (3,018 acres). This means that it would take planting 3,013 acres of trees to increase countywide tree cover by one percentage point. Planting tens of thousands of trees is understandably out of reach for many communities. Protecting existing, hard-to-replace mature shade trees is an equally important tool to increasing countywide tree cover over time.

Lake County, IL

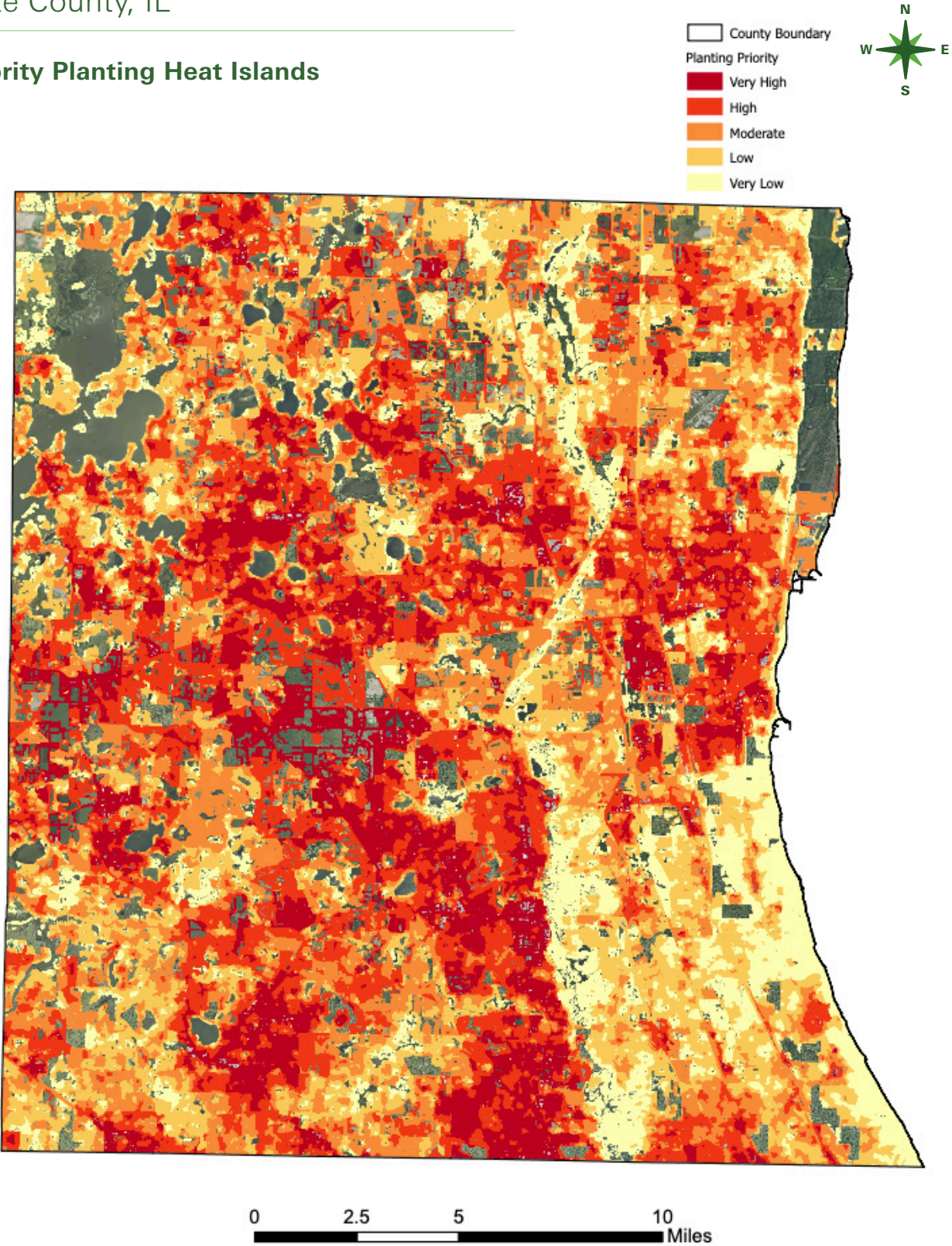
Priority Planting Stormwater



Map 5. Priority tree planting area ranked by the ability for trees to reduce stormwater runoff.

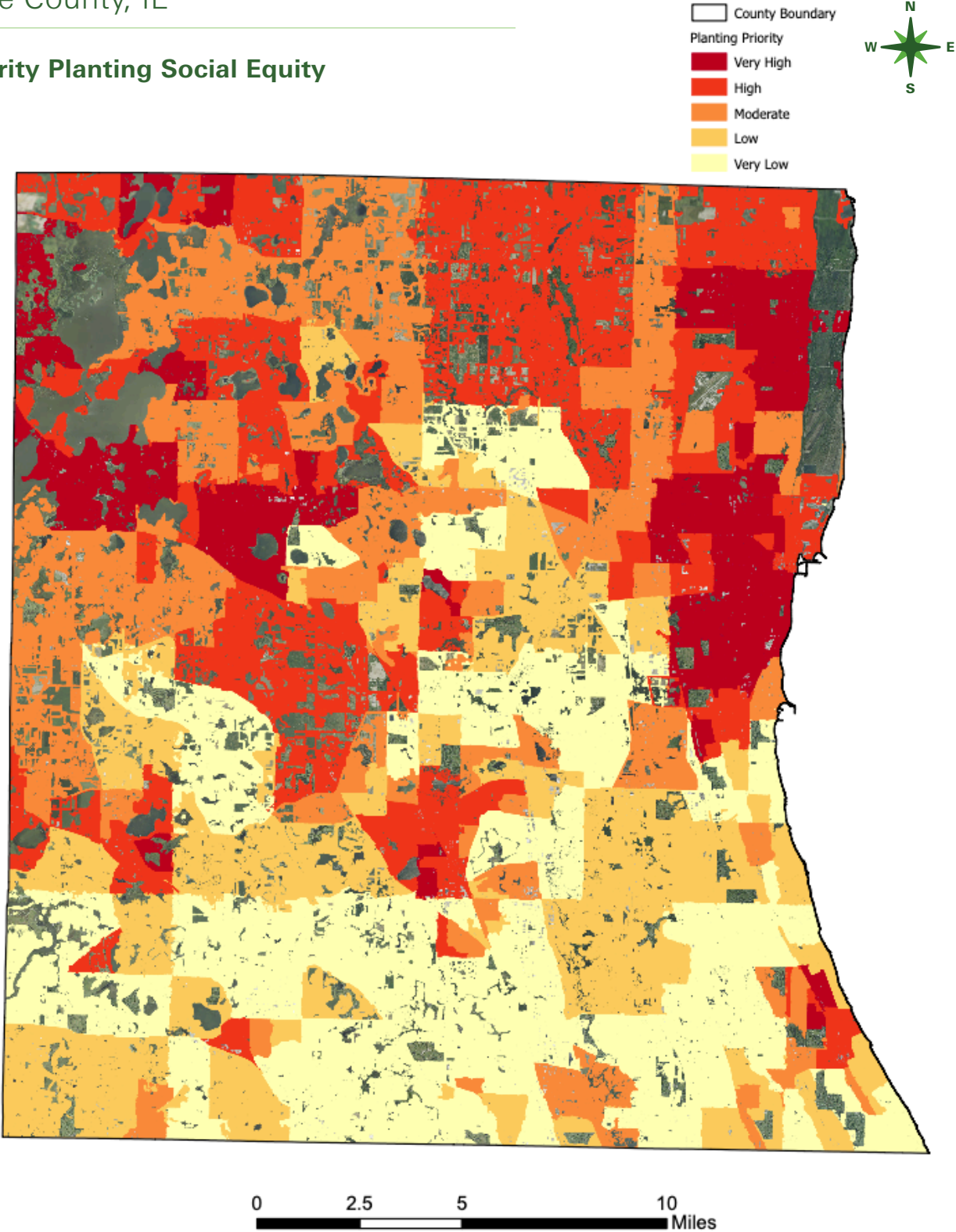
Lake County, IL

Priority Planting Heat Islands



Map 6. Priority tree planting area ranked by the ability for trees to reduce summer temperatures.

Priority Planting Social Equity



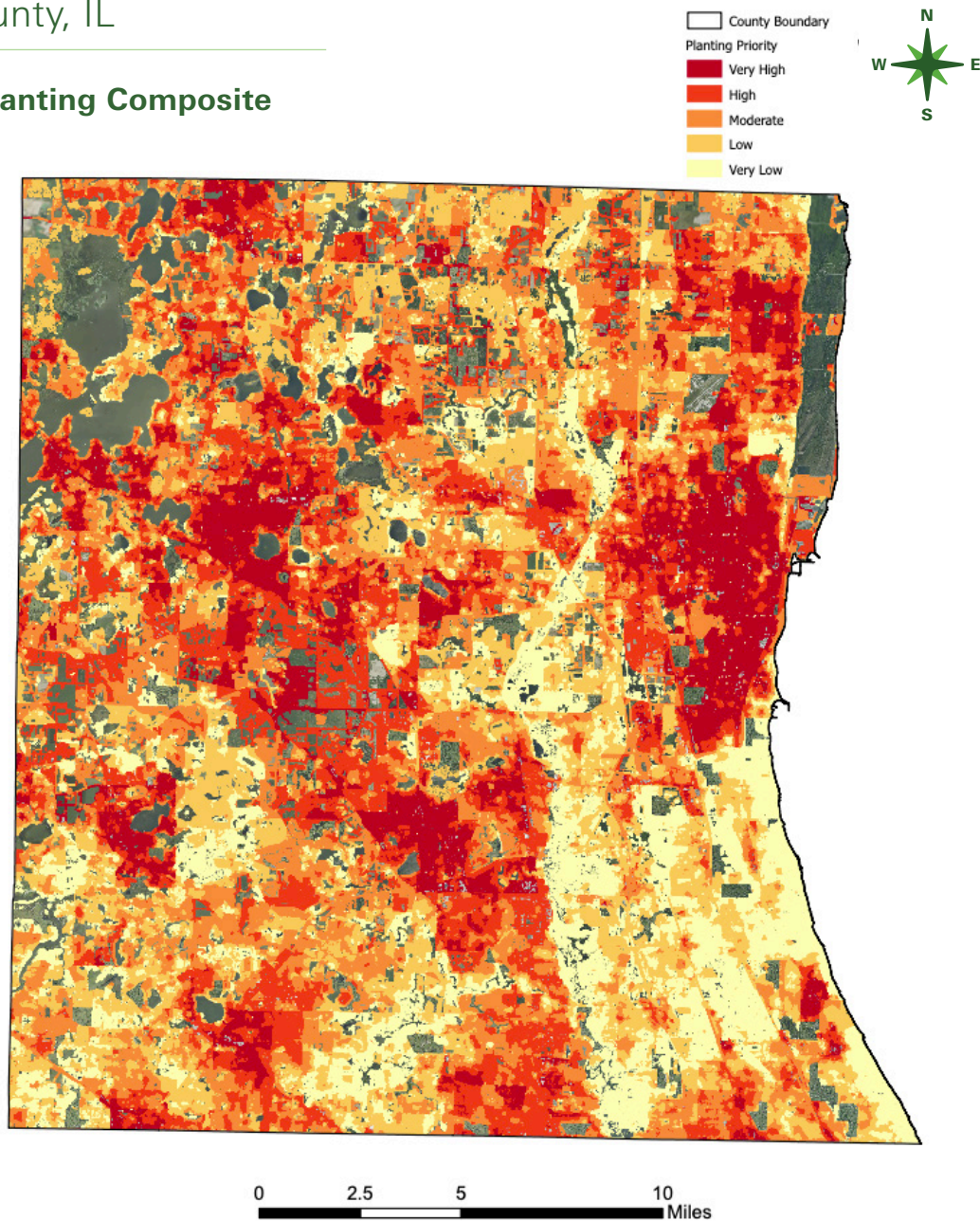
Map 7. Priority tree planting area ranked by the ability for trees to contribute to social equity by delivering benefits to residents who are vulnerable to environmental stressors and/or socioeconomic disadvantages.

Composite Priority

A composite priority layer combines the environmental and social equity factors to reveal sites where planting can address environmental, social, and human health needs. In Lake County, 31,904 acres (11% of county land area) were ranked as High or Very High priority for additional tree planting to address multiple priorities (Map 8). If all these areas were planted, countywide tree canopy cover would increase from 33% to 44%.

Lake County, IL

Priority Planting Composite



Map 8. Composite priority planting area

Chapter 2: **What Do We Want?**

The development of the *Urban and Community Forestry Strategic Plan* was guided by a comprehensive community and stakeholder engagement process. This process was designed to capture a broad range of perspectives on the role of trees in Lake County, including public perceptions, community priorities, and the issues, opportunities, and challenges facing the urban forest.

At the outset of the planning process, an outreach plan was prepared to identify the groups and individuals to be engaged, outline the methods of engagement, and establish a collaborative framework for collecting meaningful input.

Engagement activities drew upon community voices and stakeholder expertise, including input from County staff, municipal representatives, non-profit organizations, and other partners. This input not only informed the framing of challenges and opportunities but also directly shaped the recommended outcomes of the *Urban and Community Forestry Strategic Plan*. Most importantly, the engagement process produced a shared vision for the future of Lake County's urban forest, along with a set of goals that provided the foundation for the *Urban and Community Forestry Strategic Plan*. These goals inspired the Strategic Direction, defined the priorities, and guided the development of actionable strategies that will drive implementation in the years ahead.

Engagement Activities

- Steering Committee (6 meetings): January to October 2025, **11 members**
- Stakeholder Interviews (8 focus groups): March 2025, **26 participants**
- Community Survey (1 countywide survey): April to June 2025, **464 participants**
- In-person Community Engagement (2 events): August 2025, **48 participants**



What We Heard

Steering Committee

The Steering Committee was composed of eleven representatives from key County departments and community and non-profit organizations. The Committee met six times during the planning process, with meetings aligned to major project milestones.

The Steering Committee played a central advisory role in shaping the *Urban and Community Forestry Strategic Plan*. Specifically, members provided guidance on:

- Ensuring that community and stakeholder engagement was equitable, comprehensive, and directed toward the most relevant audiences
- Promoting the fair and widespread distribution of community surveys and engagement materials
- Providing local knowledge to capture the nuances and variations of urban tree canopy across the county
- Reviewing and offering input on the *Urban and Community Forestry Strategic Plan*'s direction, vision, goals, and strategic priorities

Stakeholder Engagement

Six focus groups and two one-on-one interviews collected deeper feedback to inform the development of the *Urban and Community Forestry Strategic Plan*'s priorities and direction. Focus groups were categorized into groups that could share valuable expertise and insights as to how the County should prioritize coordinated urban forestry action. These categorized focus groups included:

- Educators and Community Organizations
- Environmental Organizations
- Economic and Community Development
- Public Works
- Tree Care and Landscaping
- County and Municipal Staff

Participants

- Lake County Staff
- Municipal Partners
 - City of Waukegan
 - Village of Port Barrington
 - Village of Highland Park
 - Village of Lindenhurst
 - Village of Hawthorn Woods
- Superior Enterprises Inc.
- United States Forest Service
- Morton Arboretum, Chicago Region Trees Initiative
- Landscape Illinois
- Resource Environmental Solutions
- Openlands
- The Ancient Oaks Foundation
- Metropolitan Mayors Caucus
- Metropolitan Planning Council
- Lake County Forest Preserve District
- Youth Conservation Corps
- Gateway Technical College
- Student Conservation Association
- Community Member, Faith Leader

Lydia Scott, Former Director of CRTI, and Alex Ty Kovach, Executive Director of Lake County Forest Preserve District participated in one-on-one interviews with the Planning Team.

Themes and Priorities

The stakeholder engagement process identified several themes that were emphasized as essential to advancing urban forestry in Lake County:

- **County-level leadership and coordination in urban forestry:** Provide centralized leadership to guide coordinated action across municipalities and serve as a technical resource hub for local governments and non-profit partners. Facilitate intentional, recurring convenings of Lake County's urban forestry stakeholders to strengthen collaboration.
- **Funding and capacity constraints:** Expand and diversify funding sources to sustain urban forestry programs beyond pilot stages and build a skilled local workforce. Increase access to resources and grant opportunities that help homeowners pursue affordable tree care grounded in arboricultural best practices.

- **Expanded public awareness of trees and tree benefits:** Connect residents, workers, and visitors with consistent education and outreach that highlights the value of trees. Encourage community leadership in advocating for and supporting municipal urban forestry programs.
- **Strengthened tree preservation and maintenance practices:** Strengthen County-level guidance and oversight related to tree protection, preservation, enforcement, and the qualifications and certifications of service providers.
- **Local workforce development:** Collaborate with vocational schools, high schools, and colleges to expand training opportunities. Support apprenticeship programs and student-focused initiatives to cultivate the next generation of urban forestry professionals.
- **Climate resilience through biodiversity:** Encourage removal of non-native, invasive woody plants on private property, and incentivize replanting with native, climate-adapted, and non-invasive trees from approved species lists.
- **Tree equity:** Ensure all residents benefit from the urban forest by prioritizing planting and maintenance in low-canopy and underserved areas.

Community Survey

A community survey collected responses over seven weeks from the end of April through Mid-June 2025. The survey aimed to gather input that would assess public opinions on urban forest benefits, tree preservation, and community priorities, and inform the strategies included in the *Urban and Community Forestry Strategic Plan*.

The survey was offered and advertised in both English and Spanish. Questions were designed with repeatability in mind to capture changes in perceptions and priorities for the urban forest over time.

Who Responded

Of 464 participants who completed the community survey, most respondents are residents of Lake County and represent 43 unique zip codes both within and outside Lake County. Survey responses are consistent with the proportion of Lake County residents who own their homes and properties but underrepresent residents who do not own properties. Eighty-two percent of respondents self-identified as White and only 4% self-identified as Hispanic/Latine. These results represent just one segment of Lake County's broader community who was engaged as a part of the planning process.

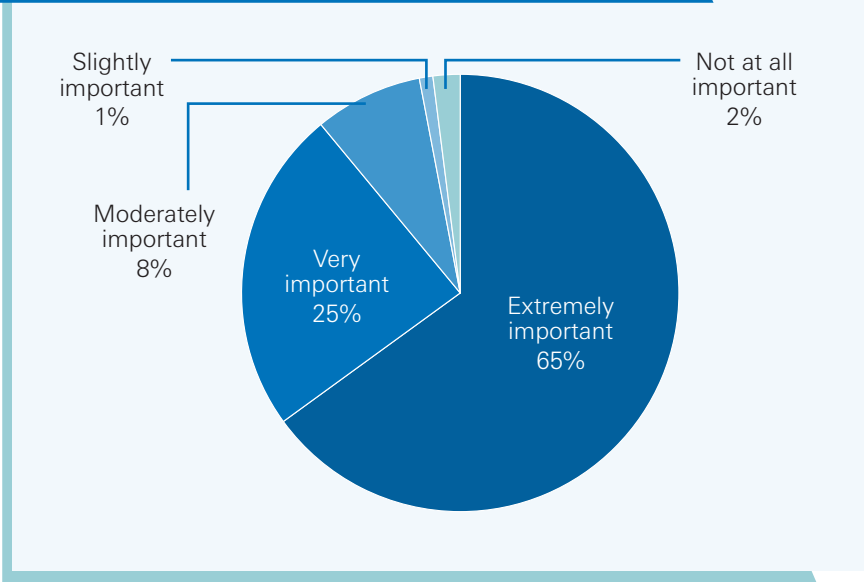
What We Heard

Community Priorities and Concerns about the Urban Forest

- **89%** of respondents feel that it is very or extremely important to have more trees in their community (Figure 8).
- **93%** of respondents feel that preserving healthy trees in Lake County is important and should be enforced.
- **91%** of respondents feel that having trees on their property is worth the financial cost of maintaining them.

How important is it to you that your community has more trees?

Figure 8. Community perceptions about having more trees in their communities among 464 community survey respondents.



When asked to describe the state of trees and how they have changed over time across Lake County, the most common themes include notions that the number of trees has declined (47%), the kinds of trees have changed (35%), and that trees are generally in worse shape (28%). The most common concerns about trees in Lake County are risk of storm damage (38%) and conflicts with infrastructure including utilities, street signs and lights (58%;Figure 9).

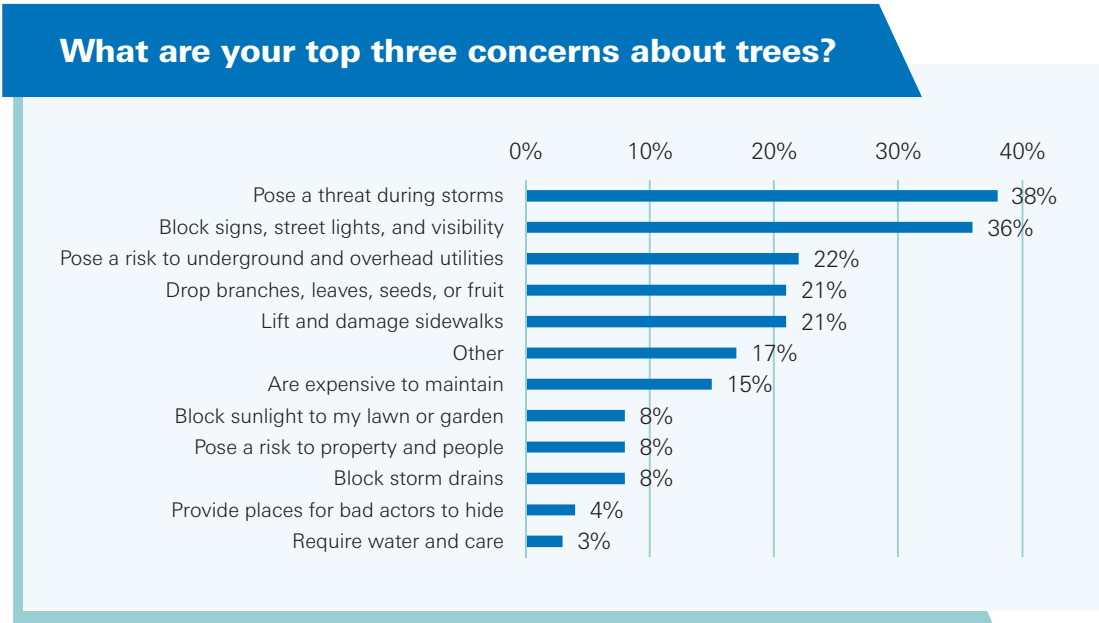


Figure 9. Top concerns about trees based on 464 responses to the community survey. Respondents could select up to three options.

Desired Resources and Programming

While Lake County has provided grants to support tree planting, it is not responsible for planting trees within its municipalities and incorporated villages. Respondents recommend prioritizing wildlife habitat (58%) and climate resilience (46%) when planting trees. Only 19% of respondents feel that planting trees for stormwater management should be a priority. When asked about who they would contact if they had a problem with a tree, 58% of respondents would contact their municipality.

When asked about where the county should prioritize investment in urban forestry resources and programs, respondents suggest prioritizing the removal of hazardous and non-native invasive trees (58%), planting new trees along county-operated land and county-maintained roads (35%), maintaining existing shade trees (29%), and supporting municipal forestry programs (24%).

Woody, non-native invasive species are of concern due to their overwhelming prevalence in Lake County. When survey respondents were asked about how they would contribute to reducing the spread of non-native invasive plant species, 86% said they would remove non-native invasive plants and replace them with native or non-invasive plants (Figure 10).

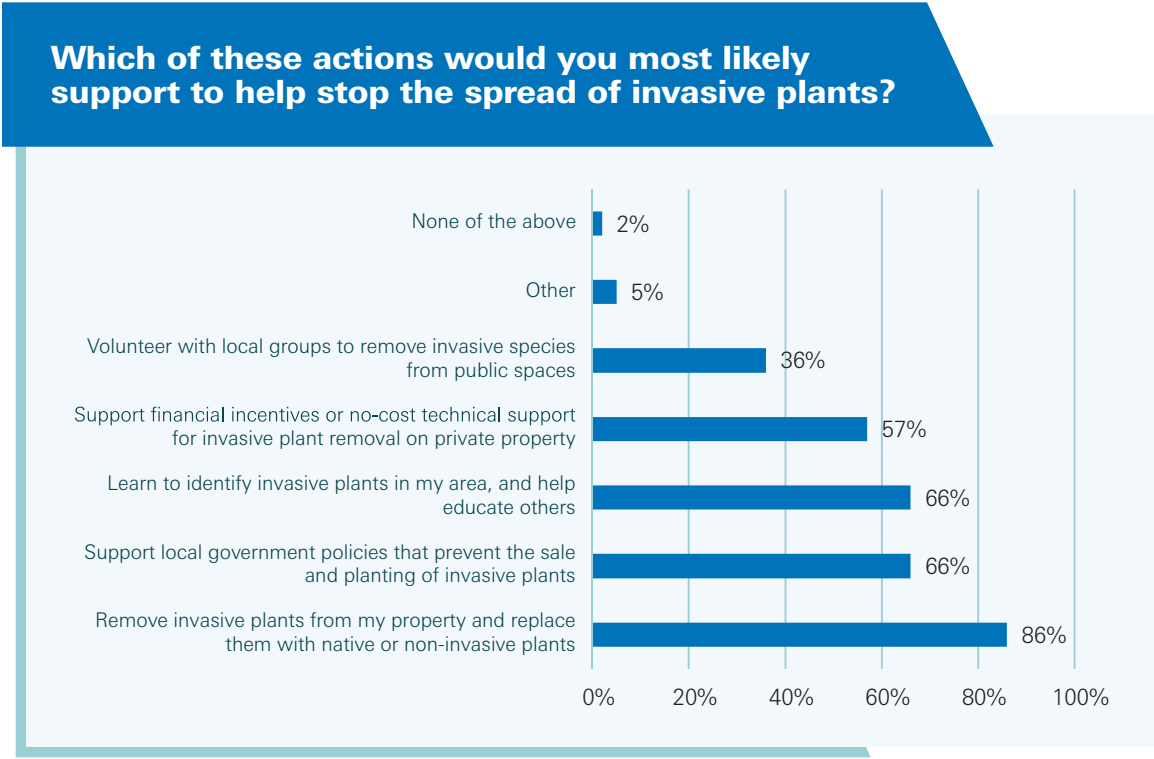


Figure 10. Programs and actions supported by survey respondents related to invasive species management.



In-Person Community Engagement

In August 2025, approximately 50 individual residents, workers, and visitors of Lake County participated in the *Urban and Community Forestry Strategic Plan's* community engagement activities across two events: a formal public meeting and a community gathering.

Participants were invited to provide direct feedback on the *Urban and Community Forestry Strategic Plan's* components, including proposed strategies and implementation actions. Input was collected through facilitated group discussions as well as interactive boards offered in both English and Spanish, where attendees could write comments and place stickers in response to prompts designed to guide and focus feedback.

The following comments were provided by community members:

- "Tree planting classes will have to be a crucial part especially for underserved communities."
- "Trees that are unhealthy can fall and cause damage to households during storms. How are we keeping up with the health of trees and safety conditions around properties?"
- "Provide professional urban forestry assistance to municipalities"
- "Provide incentives to landscaping companies and nurseries. This is who people go to for advice. Provide free training and financial incentives to get training."
- "Tree preservation ordinances - countywide"
- "The community needs to know what trees to plant. It's difficult to make decisions on what to plant."
- "Educate, encourage, engage, and equip school age children on tree awareness and benefits. Reach out to school educators to collaborate and partner with."
- "Engage residents in communities with low to no tree canopy with community conversations."
- "Most in the community don't understand the true danger of invasive buckthorn. Increase awareness so people will see this as an important use of funds."

Vision and Goals

Input gathered through surveys, focus groups, public meetings, and stakeholder discussions highlighted shared priorities, identified opportunities and underscored the challenges facing Lake County’s urban forest. From this process emerged a unifying vision and a set of goals that reflect community values and aspirations. Together, they provide the framework for the *Urban and Community Forestry Strategic Plan’s* direction, priorities, and strategies, ensuring that the path forward is both responsive to local needs and aligned with long-term resilience and equity.

Vision and Goals

Vision

Support a thriving, connected tree canopy that brings lasting value and resilience to all in Lake County.

Goal 1

Plant and care for trees to grow a healthier and accessible urban forest.

Goal 2

Collaborate to protect the urban forest.

Goal 3

Support and inspire communities to value trees.

The vision and goals for Lake County’s urban forest reinforce and advance the County’s broader strategic direction. Promoting equitable access to tree canopy, enhancing community well-being, and supporting long-term environmental resilience, directly supports the County’s priority of building healthy and inclusive communities. Expanding canopy in underserved areas, for example, contributes to reducing health inequities by improving air quality, mitigating urban heat, and increasing access to green spaces for all residents.

A key outcome of this plan is the adoption of clear, measurable tree canopy goals to guide coordinated action. A countywide canopy goal of 35% by 2040 represents an ambitious but achievable target that builds on the County’s current canopy cover (estimated at 33% per the 2017 assessment). The 2020 Tree Census found an average of 149 trees per acre in Lake County, knowing it takes 3,013 acres to increase canopy by 1%, it will take an additional

897,874 trees to increase canopy by 2%. However canopy gains can be made by the growth of existing trees and natural regeneration. In parallel, the plan supports municipalities to set and pursue canopy cover goals—such as reaching 30% canopy by 2040—aligned with their local context and capacity, with regional support and coordination. This threshold reflects the growing body of research showing that communities begin to see measurable health, air quality, and heat mitigation benefits when urban tree canopy exceeds 30% (Donavan 2010, Wolf 2007) and also aligns with national studies documenting the role of urban forests in reducing energy use, improving health outcomes, and providing billions in ecosystem services (Nowak 2013).

These targets are informed by—and aligned with—the CRTI goal to expand regional tree canopy to 22% and reflect best practices from leading urban forestry efforts across the Midwest. They also complement the conservation and stewardship goals of the Lake County Forest Preserve District (LCFPD), creating synergies between urban and natural forest systems.

Equity is a central principle in the establishment of these canopy goals. Trees are not evenly distributed across communities, and neighborhoods with less canopy often face higher levels of heat exposure, air pollution, and limited access to nature. By prioritizing canopy growth in underserved and low-canopy areas, Lake County can use its urban forestry investments to reduce health disparities, enhance climate resilience, and expand workforce development opportunities in areas where they are most needed.

In addition, the vision and goals align with the County’s commitment to a sustainable environment, which calls for climate adaptation and nature-based solutions. The *Urban and Community Forestry Strategic Plan* provides a practical pathway for implementing the County’s sustainability commitments while strengthening local resilience to climate change by emphasizing biodiversity, tree preservation, and the strategic planting of climate-adapted species.

Together, the vision and goals define the foundation of the *Urban and Community Forestry Strategic Plan*. They provide clarity of purpose and a shared direction, ensuring that the strategies and priorities outlined in the following chapter are rooted in community values and responsive to the challenges and opportunities identified throughout the engagement process.

Chapter 3: How Do We Get There?

Over the course of the 12-month planning process, a shared vision, three goals, and five strategic priorities were defined to guide the future of Lake County's urban forest (Figure 11). Each strategic priority includes a set of strategies, which were further shaped by input from community members, stakeholders, and an in-depth assessment of current urban forest conditions. From these strategies, specific actions were developed to guide implementation, accompanied by success metrics designed to measure progress. Success metrics and key performance indicators provide a way to track achievements not only at the strategy level, but also across each strategic priority over the next decade.



Figure 11. UCFSP Strategic hierarchy.

How to Read This Chapter

The information is organized by Strategic Priority. Each section begins with a description of the Strategic Priority and is followed by a list of strategies accompanied by strategic action matrices that outline implementation at a high level that includes the specific actions, timelines, partners, and resources needed to achieve the strategy.

The matrices are designed to provide clear guidance and include the following categories:

- **Strategic Action** – Concrete steps that, when completed, demonstrate progress toward implementing the *Urban and Community Forestry Strategic Plan*.
- **Timeframe** – Actions are sequenced as short term (1–3 years), midterm (3–5 years), and long term (5–10 years) to help set priorities and track phasing.
- **Capacity and Partners** – Identifies the internal resources and external partners that can contribute to successful implementation.
- **Metrics** – Defines how progress and success will be measured.
- **Cost range** – Provides an estimated cost of implementation over defined periods of time using the following ranges:
 - \$ (<\$10,000)
 - \$\$ (\$10,000–\$50,000)
 - \$\$\$ (\$50,000–\$100,000)
 - \$\$\$\$ (>\$100,000)

Strategic Priority 1: Collaborate

Position the County to lead, support, and scale regional urban forestry action

Urban forestry in Lake County is supported by a variety of independent efforts, including the ARPA-funded Tree Initiative administered by the County, regional awareness and training programs led by the Chicago Region Trees Initiative, and guidance within the County's Roadmap to Decarbonization that highlights the role of trees in stormwater management. Not all municipalities in the county have urban forestry programs, and when present, they vary in size and capacity, with some having changed over time due to available funding and changes in political support. With varying levels of advocacy at the municipal level, trees are not always integrated into infrastructure planning. Together, these findings point to an opportunity for the County to serve as a leader, facilitator, and resource hub providing alignment, coordination, and foundational support to advance regional tree canopy expansion and sustainable urban forest management.

Key Strategies and Actions:

Strategy 1.1: Lead and coordinate countywide collaboration on urban forestry

The county will provide centralized leadership for urban forestry by designating a program coordinator, establishing cross-departmental and regional partnerships, and aligning local and regional initiatives to ensure a unified and collaborative approach to advancing urban forestry goals across Lake County.



Strategic Action	Timeframe	Capacity & Partners	Metrics	Cost Range (\$-\$\$\$)
1.1.a: Establish a cross-departmental County urban forestry task force to align efforts across sustainability, stormwater, planning, public works, and communications departments.	1-3 years	Lake County Administration Green Team Planning, Building and Development Stormwater Management Commission (SMC) Public Works/Facilities Communications	Number of task force meetings held annually Number of departments actively participating	n/a
1.1.b: Convene a countywide urban forestry coalition to bring together municipal staff, non-profits, professional organizations, and private sector partners.	1-3 years	Lake County Administration External Partners: Lake County Forest Preserve District Municipal Partners with Urban Forestry programs Chicago Region Trees Initiative Openlands	Number of coalition meetings held annually Number and diversity of coalition participants (e.g., municipal staff, nonprofits, private sector partners)	\$ over 10 years, starting in year 1
1.1.c: Hire or contract an Urban Forestry Program Coordinator to lead the implementation of the UCFSP, facilitate communication, and provide centralized program leadership.	2-5 years	Lake County Administration Human Resources	Urban Forestry Program Coordinator hired or contracted	\$\$\$ /year, starting in year 2
1.1.d: Promote alignment of local and regional efforts through the UCFSP and existing County and regional plans (e.g., Forest Preserve 100-year strategy, CRTI Master Plan 2050, CMAP's ON TO 2050).	3-5 years	Lake County Administration Green Team Planning, Building and Development Stormwater Management Commission Public Works/Facilities	Number of local or regional plans aligned with the UCFSP Percentage of coalition and task force members reporting improved coordination Number of joint projects launched through coalition or task force collaboration	n/a

Strategy 1.2: Build municipal capacity for urban forestry

The County will strengthen municipal capacity by supporting staff training, fostering peer-to-peer learning among communities, and maintaining shared resources to advance consistent and effective urban forestry practices.

Strategic Action	Timeframe	Capacity & Partners	Metrics	Cost Range (\$-\$\$\$\$)
1.2.a: Develop and maintain a shared resource library of urban forestry templates via the Lake County website or other file sharing website that includes case studies, standards, and data sources.	1-3 years	Lake County Administration Communications External Partners Chicago Region Trees Initiative	Shared resource library established and accessible online Number of resources (e.g., templates, case studies, standards, data sources) added to the library Annual website analytics (e.g., page views, downloads)	\$, over 10 years
1.2.b: Collaborate with non-profit and government partners to extend existing care and planting skill-building workshops to municipal staff who support tree care and management. Consider hosting hands-on training opportunities during slower seasons (e.g. winter).	1-3 years	Lake County Administration External Partners Lake County Forest Preserve District Municipal Partners with Urban Forestry programs	Number of tree care and planting workshops hosted Number of municipal staff attending workshops	\$/year, starting in year 1
1.2.c: Facilitate a peer-to-peer learning support program between municipalities, allowing those with stronger programs to mentor those that are just beginning.	3-5 years	Lake County Administration External Partners: Municipal Partners with Urban Forestry programs Illinois Arborist Association	Number of municipalities participating in the peer-to-peer program	\$, over seven years

Strategy 1.3: Provide technical and policy support to partners

The County will advance consistent policy and planning practices by promoting the Illinois Legacy Tree Program, providing model ordinances and technical resources, and supporting the integration of trees as green infrastructure in local planning and development.

Strategic Action	Timeframe	Capacity & Partners	Metrics	Cost Range (\$-\$\$\$\$)
1.3.a: Promote the adoption of CRTI's model tree protection tools by sharing CRTI-developed policy templates, evaluation tools, and best practices with municipal partners. Encourage communities to apply CRTI's Tree Ordinance Scorecard, Model Tree Preservation Ordinance, and supporting resources -including guidance on buckthorn removal ordinances - to strengthen local policies and establish Lake County as a leader in tree protection and sustainability.	5-10 Years	Lake County Administration Legal Communications External Partners Municipal partners CRTI	Number of municipalities that adopted new or revised tree ordinances aligned with CRTI models	n/a
1.3.b: Support the integration of trees as green infrastructure in municipal planning, capital improvement, and development plans and strategies.	5-10 years	Lake County Administration External Partners Municipal Partners	Number of municipal plans or capital improvement projects that include trees as green infrastructure	n/a

Strategy 1.4: Build regional administrative and funding capacity for urban forestry programs

The County will seek to identify new and additional funding opportunities. The County may partner with municipalities on grant applications to position urban forestry projects as effective solutions that align with broader state, federal, and philanthropic priorities.

Strategic Action	Timeframe	Capacity & Partners	Metrics	Cost Range (\$-\$\$\$\$)
1.4.a: Support municipal partners in pursuing state, federal, and philanthropic funding.	1-3 years	<div>Lake County</div> <div>Administration</div> <div>External Partners</div> <div>Municipal partners</div>	<div>Amount of external funding (state, federal, philanthropic) secured</div> <div>Number of municipalities or partners receiving county support on grant applications, compliance, or reporting</div>	\$, over 10 years
1.4.b: Leverage UCFSP projects and initiatives to further funding opportunities by framing trees and urban forestry as effective tools in grant applications.	3-5 years	<div>Lake County</div> <div>Administration</div> <div>Grants / Finance</div>	<div>Number of grant proposals or initiatives that explicitly frame urban forestry as a tool for achieving environmental, health, or infrastructure outcomes</div>	n/a

Implementation Notes

Providing Clear and Easy-to-Access Funding Guidance: To help municipalities access external funding effectively, the County could develop a centralized guidance resource that compiles relevant grant, cost-share, and funding program options, mirroring Lake County’s Stormwater Management Commission’s “Funding Sources” toolkit. Key elements could include eligibility requirements, matching fund rules, timelines for applications (e.g., RFP / grant cycles), contact info for program managers, links to applications, and examples of successful past projects.

Connecting Urban Forestry with Green Infrastructure Initiatives: A Case Study: Philadelphia provides a useful example of how urban forestry can be embedded within broader climate and stormwater initiatives. By incorporating trees into its Climate Action Playbook and Green City, Clean Waters stormwater program, the city created multiple funding pathways tied to regional climate grants, stormwater utility funding, and federal climate and infrastructure programs (City of Philadelphia 2021). Lake County could adopt a similar approach by framing urban forestry as essential to achieving stormwater, climate resilience, and infrastructure goals, thereby expanding the range of eligible funding sources available to support tree planting and long-term management.

Community feedback that supports these strategies

“The County can help educate municipal staff on proper tree care maintenance”

– Anonymous survey respondent

“Work with municipalities to ensure they are aware of all the potential grants that could support planting more trees”

– Anonymous survey respondent

“Provide professional assistance to municipal partners to help manage trees and non-native invasive species”

– Anonymous public meeting participant

“Lake County should consider forward looking research to inform municipalities of severe and changing climate impacts in trees and forests”

– Anonymous survey respondent

“When new trees are planted on public spaces, maintenance (watering!) in the first few years is often lacking and the new trees die. More support for new trees until they are established could make a difference”

– Anonymous survey respondent

Strategic Priority 2: Plant

Grow the County’s Urban Tree Canopy

As of 2017, tree canopy covered 33% of the County’s land area, with nearly 86,000 additional acres identified as possible for planting. Regional and local initiatives, such as the CRTI *Master Plan 2050*, and the Lake County Forest Preserve District’s *100-Year Strategy* emphasize the role of canopy goals, data-driven planning, and targeted planting in achieving environmental and community benefits. Stakeholder input and national tools such as American Forests’ Tree Equity Score highlight both opportunities to expand canopy and disparities in access to tree cover. The County can assist municipalities in setting and tracking their own canopy goals, sharing updated tree canopy data, and encouraging community investment in planting on both public and private lands. It can also help align municipal priorities with County-wide goals and collaborate on expanding tree planting on County-managed properties.

Key Strategies and Actions:

Strategy 2.1: Realize Countywide canopy goals and planting priorities

The County will support equitable canopy expansion goals, prioritize climate-adapted and native species plantings on county-owned and unincorporated lands, and advocate for sustained funding to support long-term tree replacement and ecosystem restoration.

Strategic Action	Timeframe	Capacity & Partners	Metrics	Cost Range (\$-\$\$\$\$)
2.1.a: Support a County-wide tree canopy goal of 35% and support municipalities to set and pursue canopy cover goals—such as reaching 30% canopy by 2040—aligned with their local context and capacity, with regional support and coordination.	1-10 years	<div>Lake County</div> <div>Administration</div> <div>Communications</div> <div>External Partners</div> <div>Municipal partners</div> <div>Chicago Region Trees Initiative</div> <div>Lake County Forest Preserve District</div>	<div>Regularly track canopy</div> <div>Number of municipalities meeting or exceeding target</div>	n/a
2.1.b: Leverage the success of the ARPA funded Tree Initiative to secure funding for future urban forestry projects and initiatives	1-3 years	<div>Lake County</div> <div>Administration</div> <div>Grants / Finance</div>	<div>Amount of funding secured for urban forestry projects and initiatives</div>	n/a
2.1.c: Plant and maintain native and climate-adapted tree species, on county owned and managed land	1-10 years; ongoing	<div>Lake County</div> <div>Administration</div> <div>Grants / Finance</div> <div>Facilities</div>	<div>Number of trees planted</div> <div>Number of climate-adapted tree species planted</div> <div>Number of trees receiving establishment care</div> <div>Number of trees that survive past the establishment period (3-5 years).</div>	\$\$-\$\$\$ /year, starting in year 3

Strategy 2.2: Collect and share urban forestry data

The County will improve understanding of the urban forest by conducting inventories, encouraging municipal assessments and data collection, and compiling regional findings into regular reports and canopy updates to track progress over time.

Strategic Action	Timeframe	Capacity & Partners	Metrics	Cost Range (\$-\$\$\$\$)
2.2.a: Establish a recurring update cycle for the Countywide Urban Tree Canopy (UTC) assessment.	1-3 years	Lake County Administration External Partners: Chicago Region Trees Initiatives	UTC assessment update cycle established (e.g., every 5 years) Completion of UTC assessment updates according to schedule	\$\$\$, one time cost, every 5 years.
2.2.b: Advocate for 50% of Lake County municipalities to adopt municipal urban forest management plans, urban tree canopy (UTC) goals, and public/complete tree inventories.	3-5 years	Lake County Administration External Partners: Municipal Partners Chicago Region Trees Initiatives	Number of municipalities with an adopted management plan, UTC assessment, or complete tree inventory	n/a
2.2c: Conduct an inventory of public trees on County-owned and managed land	3-5 years	Lake County Administration Public Works / Facilities	Completion of a public tree inventory for all County-owned and managed land	\$\$ - \$\$\$\$\$, one time cost
2.2.d: Prepare an annual report that compiles available municipal urban forestry assessment data to track regional trends. Share the state of the urban forest across Lake County annually	5-10 years	Lake County Administration Communications External Partners: Municipal Partners Chicago Region Trees Initiatives	Annual "State of the Urban Forest" report published and distributed Number of municipalities contributing data to the annual report	\$, over 5 years, starting in year 5

Implementation Notes

Leverage CRTI's Urban and Community Forestry Grants: The Morton Arboretum's CRTI administers a variety of urban and community forestry grants that can directly support Lake County and its numerous municipalities and communities in tree planting and care, invasive species removal, tree inventories and management plans, and efforts to improve tree equity in underserved areas. Local governments and their partners are encouraged to apply for funding, and if they need assistance navigating the often-daunting process of applying for grant money, CRTI offers guidance and assistance free of charge!

Recognizing and Rewarding Municipal Contributions to Data Tracking: Reliable data is essential for measuring progress, identifying emerging challenges, and guiding effective solutions, yet reporting and compliance can place a significant burden on municipalities. To ease this process, communities should be encouraged to use established tracking tools already in use across Illinois, such as the Community Accomplishments Reporting System (CARS), which collects and tracks achievements in urban and community forestry (Illinois Department of Natural Resources 2021). Recognition of local successes, such as the completion of a management plan or the hiring of an urban forester, can be highlighted in Lake County's *State of the Urban Forest* Annual Report, reinforcing the value of municipal participation and celebrating contributions to regional goals.

Strategy 2.3: Incentivize tree planting and protection on private property

The County will encourage private landowner participation in canopy growth by offering incentives for planting native trees, removing invasive species, and successfully caring for young trees through establishment.

Strategic Action	Timeframe	Capacity & Partners	Metrics	Cost Range (\$-\$\$\$\$)
2.3.a: Offer vouchers for free or reduced-priced native trees to private landowners who manage non-native invasive plants on their property.	1-3 years	<i>Lake County</i> Administration <i>External Partners:</i> Private sector nurseries Openlands	Number of vouchers distributed Number of native trees planted through the voucher program Number of non-native invasive plants removed	\$\$/year, starting in year 3
2.3.b: Explore other incentives to reward property owners who have planted native trees and successfully stewarded trees through the establishment period (approx. 3-5 years).	3-5 years	<i>Lake County</i> Administration	Completion of incentive program design and pilot Number of property owners participating in incentive programs Percentage of rewarded trees surviving past the establishment period Number of incentives issued	\$\$/year, starting in year 5

Implementation Notes

Case Study: Non-native & Invasive Species/Native Plant Exchange: Incentive programs can be an effective way to encourage the removal of invasive species while promoting the use of native plants. A buy-back model, where residents remove an invasive tree or shrub in exchange for a free native replacement, provides both education and direct impact. Similar programs exist, such as in Medina County, Ohio, where Soil & Water Conservation District and Medina County Park District have teamed up to administer a Callery pear buy-back program which has successfully reduced Callery pear populations while increasing native tree cover (Medina Soil and Water Conservation District 2025). A Lake County program could highlight priority invasive species and partner with local nurseries or conservation groups to supply native stock.

Community feedback that supports these strategies

According to the UCFSP Community Survey, 64% of respondents support tax incentives or cost-sharing programs for private property owners for tree-related expenses (i.e. watering, pruning, and removal).

“The County should lead by example by ensuring that all trees on county properties are properly improved and maintained”

– Anonymous survey respondent

“The County should invest in tree planting in the rights-of-way and County property”

– Anonymous survey respondent

“Set up and monitor the urban forest and report out findings to the community”

– Anonymous survey respondent

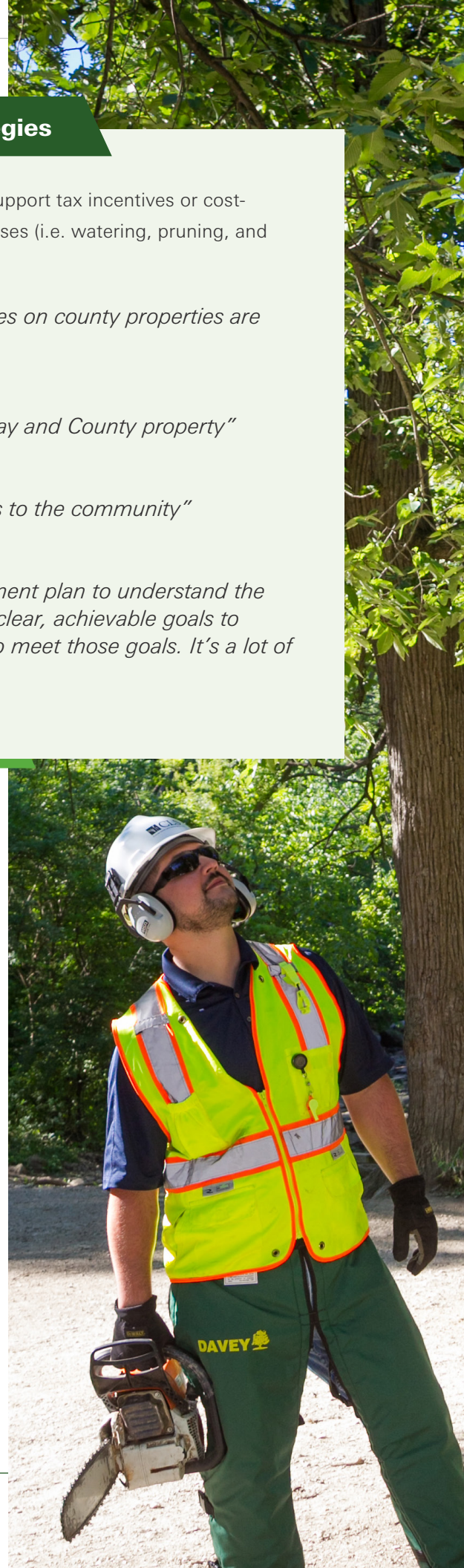
“Each municipality needs their own urban forestry management plan to understand the current level of tree canopy/tree health; identify one or two clear, achievable goals to improve the tree canopy/tree health; help direct resources to meet those goals. It’s a lot of work, but each community is going to be different”

– Anonymous survey respondent

Strategic Priority 3: Cultivate

Manage non-native invasive plants to support a more diverse and resilient ecosystem

Data from the Chicago Region Trees Initiative indicate that European buckthorn accounts for more than half of trees sampled, while important native species are also abundant but vulnerable to environmental stressors, pests, and climate change. The prevalence of non-native, invasive plants, limited species diversity, and shifting climate conditions underscore the importance of management strategies that promote biodiversity and regional resilience. Existing efforts, such as the County’s approved *Plant Materials List* (See Lake County Unified Development Ordinance, *Appendix A*), the Forest



Preserve District’s long-range restoration vision, and collaborative programs led by regional partners, provide a foundation for action. Building on this foundation, the County can serve as a technical resource to municipalities and landowners by sharing guidance, tools, and funding to support invasive species management and expand the diversity of trees planted, with a focus on native trees, ensuring a healthier and more resilient urban forest.

Key Strategies and Actions

Strategy 3.1: Coordinate Lake County’s response plan for non-native invasive plants

The County will lead a coordinated response to non-native invasive plants by compiling regional data, developing a dashboard, and partnering with local organizations to guide targeted action and long-term control.

Strategic Action	Timeframe	Capacity & Partners	Metrics	Cost Range (\$-\$\$\$\$)
3.1.a: Conduct or compile regional non-native invasive species data and current mgmt. actions to identify priority management zones that compliment ongoing efforts and align with other Lake County priorities; Share non-native invasive species data with municipal partners, conservation groups, and other community partners to inform management plans and targeted removals.	1-3 years	<div>Lake County Administration</div> <div>GIS</div> <div>External Partners</div> <div>Chicago Region Trees Initiative</div> <div>Lake County Forest Preserve District</div>	<div>Regional dataset of non-native invasive species compiled</div>	\$\$, one time cost
3.1.b: Develop a Lake County Non-Native Invasive Species Management dashboard to centralize and visualize ongoing and planned control efforts. The dashboard should include interactive maps, project locations, treatment timelines, and summary statistics to track progress, support collaboration, and inform future priorities.	3-5 years	<div>Lake County Administration</div> <div>Public Works / Facilities</div> <div>GIS / IT</div> <div>External Partners</div> <div>Municipal partners</div> <div>Lake County Forest Preserve District</div> <div>Lake County Division of Transportation</div> <div>Illinois Department of Natural Resources</div>	<div>Completion of invasive species dashboard</div> <div>Dashboard utilized by partners and publicly accessible</div>	\$\$

Implementation Notes

Framework for Prioritizing Buckthorn Management Zones in Lake County: Equity, Workforce, and Strategic Alignment

Lake County is heavily infested with European buckthorn and due to the expanse of its infestation, it is not feasible to treat all areas equally or immediately. Prioritizing zones that advance equity, build workforce capacity, and support existing restoration initiatives ensures that limited resources deliver the greatest social, ecological, and operational return.

Here's how to focus the work:

Advance Equity in Access to Healthy Urban Forests

Target areas where invasive buckthorn reduces the usability, safety, or ecological value of green space in communities that:

- Have low existing canopy cover (using tree canopy or Tree Equity Score)
- Have limited access to high-quality parks or trails
- Have overgrown parkland, stormwater parcels, or trail corridors that could be revitalized for passive use

Opportunity: Restoration in these areas can reclaim degraded public space, grow tree canopy, and support climate resilience and greenspace access where it's needed most.

Support Local Workforce Development & Volunteer Engagement

Prioritize sites that:

- Could serve as training grounds for youth corps, green workforce programs, or returning citizens (e.g., in partnership with local job programs)
- Are accessible and safe for community workdays
- Could benefit from multi-year labor, offering meaningful seasonal employment for removal, monitoring, replanting, and stewardship

Opportunity: Focus on zones near transit, schools, or community centers where young people can engage. Buckthorn removal is labor-intensive but high-impact — ideal for low-barrier green job entry points.

Complement and Strengthen Existing Ecological Restoration Efforts

Target areas where buckthorn control would:

- Protect previous investments (e.g., Forest Preserve natural areas, municipal woodlands, or other sites)
- Buffer high-quality remnant ecosystems (e.g., oak groves, wetlands)
- Address spread vectors (e.g., trail edges, utility corridors, fence lines between unmanaged and restored parcels)

Opportunity: Support cross-boundary coordination and fill in the gaps where municipal, county, and nonprofit partners are already working but need additional capacity or continuity.

Strategy 3.2: Promote awareness and best practices in non-native invasive plant management

The County will raise public awareness of invasive species impacts, promote best practices for their removal and replacement with resilient native trees and shrubs, and provide guidance and funding to support effective community and municipal management efforts.

Strategic Action	Timeframe	Capacity & Partners	Metrics	Cost Range (\$-\$\$\$\$)
3.2.a: Provide best-practice guidance for identification, monitoring, treatment/removal, and disposal of high-priority woody non-native invasive species, such as European buckthorn and Japanese honeysuckle, and replacement plantings with native and climate-resilient tree species.	1-3 years	Lake County Administration Communications External Partners Lake County Forest Preserve District	Guidance documents or materials published and publicly available Number of municipalities, land managers, or community groups that adopt County guidance	\$/year, starting in year 3
3.2.b: Educate and engage the public on non-native invasive species impacts.	3-5 years	Lake County Administration Communications External Partners Lake County Forest Preserve District	Number of public outreach events, workshops, or campaigns held Number of residents reached through outreach (attendance, digital engagement, or material distribution)	\$/year, starting in year 4
3.2.c: Develop a county-administered grant program to support municipal and community-led European buckthorn management projects. Emphasize inclusion of monitoring and follow-up treatment in funded programs to ensure long-term success and ecosystem recovery.	5-10 years	Lake County Administration Finance	Grant program established and launched Amount of funding distributed through the program	\$\$\$\$, over 5 year period, starting in year 5

County-Level Invasive Species Grant Programs

Loudoun County, Virginia – Invasive Plant Species Management Program (IPSMP)

In 2025, Loudoun County launched a \$2 million grant program to support the removal and management of non-native invasive plants across both public and private lands. Grants are available to HOAs, nonprofits, farms, and other landowners, with a focus on high-visibility, community-centered projects.

Program highlights:

- Emphasizes monitoring, multi-year treatment, and public education
- Requires applicants to include demonstration signage and behavior change strategies
- Technical oversight provided by the Loudoun Soil & Water Conservation District

Learn more: loudouninvasives.com

Oakland County, Michigan – Community Habitat Improvement Projects (CHIPs)

Through its Parks Department, Oakland County funds municipal-led projects that improve ecological health by controlling invasive species and restoring habitat. Eligible applicants include cities, villages, and townships.

Program highlights:

- Supports woody invasive removal, native planting, and stewardship
- Prioritizes parks, greenways, and public natural areas
- Encourages partnerships between municipalities and local volunteer groups

Learn more: oakgov.com

Implementation Notes

Promoting Homeowner Best Practices: Homeowners play a critical role in reducing invasive species and restoring native tree cover, since much of the urban forest is located on private land. The County can promote best practices for invasive species removal and native tree replanting through targeted outreach campaigns and accessible educational resources. Guidance might include safe and effective removal methods, seasonal timing, proper disposal techniques, and recommendations for resilient native replacement species. Providing this information through workshops, online toolkits, demonstration projects, and partnerships with local nurseries or garden centers can make it easier for residents to join the effort.

Encouraging “Right Tree Right Place” when Replacement Planting: “Right tree in the right place” means choosing a tree species that is well-suited to its planting location. When tree species and site conditions are well matched, trees are healthier, require less maintenance, and are allowed the opportunity to provide greater environmental, economic, and social benefits. Before choosing a tree to plant as a replacement to a removed non-native invasive woody plant, it’s important that homeowners understand the conditions of their planting site. Planting sites conditions, including utilities and right-of-way rules, goals for the tree, and Lake County’s environment are also important considerations to keep in mind when replanting a native, climate-resilient replacement tree. Planting and establishing the right tree in the right place today ensures the tree will thrive for many years to come!

Strategy 3.3: Support homeowners with incentives for non-native invasive species management

The County will help homeowners manage invasive plants by offering programmatic support, incentives, and replacement native trees, while partnering with local organizations to expand successful community programs and promote long-term stewardship.

Strategic Action	Timeframe	Capacity & Partners	Metrics	Cost Range (\$\$\$\$\$)
------------------	-----------	---------------------	---------	-------------------------

3.3.a: Partner with non-profits, like The Ancient Oaks Foundation and/or Openlands. Support and promote citizen-level invasive species management programs countywide.	1-3 years	Lake County Administration External Partners: Ancient Oaks Foundation Openlands Non-profit partners	Number of joint programs, events, or projects co-hosted with partners Number of residents reached or supported	n/a
--	-----------	--	---	-----

3.3.b: Offer access to trained professionals or volunteer networks to assist residents with safe and effective non-native invasive plant removal.	1-3 years	Lake County Administration External Partners: Lake County Forest Preserve District Non-Profit Partners Private Sector service providers	List of trained professionals or private sector service providers established Number of resident requests for assistance fulfilled each year	n/a
---	-----------	--	---	-----

3.3.c: Host community "bounty events" where residents can bring in cut non-native invasive material (e.g., buckthorn) for proper disposal and receive rewards, free native plants, or educational resources.	1-3 years	Lake County Administration External Partners: Ancient Oaks Foundation	Number of bounty events hosted Total amount (e.g., cubic yards or pounds) of invasive plant material collected and properly disposed of at events Number of participants attending each event	\$\$/year, starting in year 2
--	-----------	--	---	-------------------------------

3.3.d: Provide free or discounted native replacement trees or shrubs to encourage replanting with climate-resilient species after non-native invasive removals.	3-5 years	Lake County Administration External Partners Local nurseries and home improvement vendors	Number of free or discounted trees/shrubs distributed Survival rate of replacement plantings after three years	\$\$/year, starting in year 4
---	-----------	--	---	-------------------------------

3.3.e: Develop a homeowner assistance and bounty program that provides technical support, cost-sharing grants, or small incentives for the removal of high-priority non-native invasive plants on private property.	3-5 years	Lake County Administration	Program design completed and launched Number of participating homeowners	\$\$/year, starting in year 4
---	-----------	--------------------------------------	---	-------------------------------

Implementation Notes

Hamilton County Invasive Species Trade-In Program: To address invasive plants and promote native ecosystem health, The Hamilton County Invasive Partnership and Soil and Water Conservation District, (Hamilton County, Indiana) administers the Invasive Species Trade-In program. Private property owners are encouraged to identify and remove designated invasive species from their land, including autumn olive, bush honeysuckle, Japanese barberry, and Norway maple. Participants register with the program, document the plants prior to removal, carry out removal following recommended practices, and submit “after” photos to receive a reward. Incentives are provided based on the type and size of plants removed, supporting residents in actively contributing to county-wide invasive species management and habitat restoration (Hamilton County Invasive Species Partnership 2025).

Local Progress & Countywide Successes: Celebrating Glenview’s Buckthorn Removal Incentive Program: Lake County can look to Glenview’s Buckthorn Removal Incentive Program as a strong example of supporting property owners to eliminate invasive species. Glenview offers a 50% reimbursement (up to \$600) for approved buckthorn removal—including removal, disposal, and stump treatment/grinding—on both residential and commercial properties (Village of Glenview 2025). By promoting full eradication of the invasive plant and encouraging native landscaping replacements, the program advances ecological health and increases diversity of canopy cover. Lake County could adopt a similar model for residents living in unincorporated areas: cost-share or rebate programs for invasive removal, clear eligibility and documentation requirements, and tie-ins to native tree/shrub replacement.

Community feedback that supports these strategies

“I need help to identify and remove invasive trees from my property”

– Anonymous survey respondent

“The County should provide financial assistance to help with the removal of invasive buckthorn”

– Anonymous survey respondent

“It is hard to stay updated on invasive species”

– Anonymous survey respondent

“We need invasive species buy back/homeowner education programs”

– Anonymous survey respondent

“Encourage municipalities by providing technical support for the preservation of oaks, hickories and other natives, and removal of invasives such as buckthorn”

– Anonymous survey respondent



Strategic Priority 4: Train

Build tomorrow's urban forestry workforce

Urban forestry workforce capacity in Lake County varies widely, with two-thirds of municipalities lacking dedicated professional staff to implement tree care and management practices. Existing programs such as the Youth Conservation Corps and the Arborist Registered Apprenticeship provide valuable models for hands-on training, professional credentialing, and career development, but stakeholders noted challenges in scaling and sustaining these opportunities locally. At the same time, municipal departments often face capacity and resource limitations, and reliance on low-bid contracting can create inconsistencies in tree care quality. These findings highlight the importance of coordinated workforce development that reinforces industry standards, expands access to structured training and career pathways, and supports sustainable staffing approaches. By facilitating partnerships and serving as a convener, the County can help advance a skilled, diverse, and well-equipped workforce to meet current and future urban forestry needs.

Key Strategies and Actions

Strategy 4.1: Establish inclusive workforce pipelines in Urban Forestry to support Lake County's municipal partners

The County will strengthen the urban forestry workforce by assessing community needs, partnering with training providers and local organizations, and creating pathways to build municipal capacity and support equitable employment opportunities.

Strategic Action	Timeframe	Capacity & Partners	Metrics	Cost Range (\$-\$\$\$)
<p>4.1.a: Identify opportunities for workforce training</p> <p>Conduct community needs assessments that identify urban forestry workforce barriers and needs.</p> <p>Partner with trusted community-based organizations to help design and facilitate outreach efforts.</p> <p>Use the results to inform program design, funding priorities, and wraparound services for training programs</p>	1-3 years	<p>Lake County</p> <p>Administration</p> <p>Workforce Development</p> <p>External Partners</p> <p>Municipal partners</p> <p>Community development corporations</p> <p>Local workforce development organizations</p> <p>College of Lake County</p>	<p>Number of community needs assessments conducted</p> <p>Workforce development program designed, funded, and piloted.</p>	<p>\$\$/year, for two years starting in year 4</p>
<p>4.1.b: Facilitate relationship-building between workforce development program staff, vocational and trade schools, non-profit partners and municipal partners to develop county-sponsored internship programs</p>	5-10 years	<p>Lake County</p> <p>Administration</p> <p>Workforce Development</p> <p>External Partners</p> <p>Municipal partners</p> <p>Lake County vocational and trade schools</p> <p>College of Lake County</p> <p>Non-profit partners like Youth Conservation Corps</p>	<p>Number of partnerships established</p>	<p>n/a</p>

Strategy 4.2: Support workforce development and elevate professional standards in private sector tree care.

The County will collaborate with private sector partners to strengthen career pathways in tree care, connect employers and job seekers through shared resources, and promote industry standards that ensure high-quality and professional urban forestry services.

Strategic Action

Timeframe

Capacity & Partners

Metrics

Cost Range (\$-\$\$\$)

<p>4.2.a: Establish and maintain a directory of local employers and job opportunities in the urban forestry sector to serve as a centralized resource for job seekers and training partners.</p> <p>Connect Lake County-based employers with regional job fairs that are lacking in green job representation, such as “Sustainability Careers Exploration & Networking Fair ” at Northern Illinois University</p>	1-3 years	<p>Lake County</p> <p>Administration</p> <p>Workforce Development</p> <p>External Partners</p> <p>Private sector tree care and landscaping service providers</p> <p>Local workforce development organizations</p> <p>Regional universities</p>	<p>Directory created and published</p> <p>Number of employers and job opportunities listed</p>	n/a
<p>4.2.b: Develop and share specifications for selecting reliable tree care vendors that demonstrate compliance with state and industry best practices in tree care and urban forestry.</p>	1-3 years	<p>Lake County</p> <p>Administration</p> <p>Workforce Development</p> <p>Communications</p> <p>External Partners</p> <p>Local nonprofits like Openlands</p>	<p>Specifications document completed and disseminated</p>	n/a
<p>4.2.c: Collaborate with local landscaping, tree care, and ecological rehabilitation companies to develop structured career pathways for entry-level workers.</p> <p>Facilitate roundtables or listening sessions with employers to identify shared workforce needs and capacity for mentorship or on-the-job training.</p> <p>Explore County incentives (e.g., recognition, grant eligibility) for businesses that hire and retain workers from training pipelines.</p>	3-5 years	<p>Lake County</p> <p>Administration</p> <p>Workforce Development</p> <p>External Partners</p> <p>Private sector tree care and landscaping service providers</p> <p>Local workforce development organizations</p>	<p>Number of employer roundtables or listening sessions conducted</p> <p>Number of businesses participating in County incentive programs for hiring and retaining trained workers</p> <p>Number of entry-level workers placed in structured on-the-job training or mentorship programs</p>	\$ over 3 years, starting in year 3

Strategy 4.3: Launch pilot workforce development programs that create paid training and career pathways in urban forestry for students, veterans, and underrepresented communities.

The County will pilot workforce development programs that provide paid training, reduce barriers to participation, and connect students, veterans, and underrepresented groups with career pathways in urban forestry aligned with industry certifications.

Strategic Action	Timeframe	Capacity & Partners	Metrics	Cost Range (\$-\$\$\$\$)
4.3.a: Consult with training providers to align pilot programs with relevant industry-recognized certifications (e.g. ISA, IAA, TCIA).	3-5 years	Lake County Administration Workforce Development External Partners Illinois Arborist Association International Society of Arboriculture	Pilot program is aligned with relevant industry-recognized certifications 	n/a
4.3.b: Collect program feedback and track participant outcomes to improve future programming and support long-term scalability.	3-5 years	Lake County Administration Workforce Development Communications	Percentage of participants providing feedback via surveys or interviews Lessons learned documented and applied to at least one subsequent program cycle	\$, one time cost
4.3.c: Explore opportunities for the County to provide support or funding to pilot workforce development programs administered by non-profit or municipal partners focused on tree planting, tree care, and ecological recovery	3-5 years	Lake County Administration Workforce Development External Partners Private sector tree care and landscaping service providers Local workforce development organizations	Urban forestry workforce development program piloted and funded Number of participants enrolled in pilot programs	\$\$\$, over 3 years, starting in year 3

Implementation Notes

Reducing Barriers to Workforce Participation: Equitable access to workforce development programs can be strengthened by addressing the practical barriers that limit participation. The County could provide tuition stipends directly or through partnerships with local training providers, secure grant funding or sponsorships to cover the cost of tools and safety equipment, and work with transit agencies or community organizations to subsidize transportation. These measures reduce financial strain and expand opportunities for individuals who might otherwise be excluded, helping to build a more diverse and prepared workforce that reflects the communities it serves.

Community feedback that supports these strategies

"Provide incentives to the private sector, like landscaping companies and nurseries. This is who people go to for advice. Provide free training and financial incentives to get tree care training"

– Anonymous public meeting participant

"Support co-tech courses in forestry and habitat restoration"

– Anonymous public meeting participant

"Work with communities with more limited resources to facilitate better care for wooded areas"

– Anonymous survey respondent

"Plant trees in impoverished areas and create municipal workforce training programs to help move folks into sustainable employment"

– Anonymous survey respondent



Strategic Priority 5: Educate

Engage and empower residents through urban forestry

Community input underscores strong public support for tree preservation and a recognition of the benefits trees provide, including shade, wildlife habitat, and improved air quality. Survey respondents also identified interest in participating in stewardship activities such as invasive species removal and replacement planting. Reports such as the Brushwood Center’s *Health, Equity and Nature Report* highlight areas of the county where residents face overlapping environmental and health inequities and where expanded tree canopy could provide meaningful benefits. These findings point to the importance of outreach and engagement strategies that are accessible, inclusive, and targeted, particularly in low-canopy communities. By fostering awareness and creating more opportunities for participation, the County can help build lasting support for urban forestry while advancing equity and resilience.

Key Strategies and Actions:

Strategy 5.1: Grow public awareness of trees and tree benefits.

The County will increase public awareness of trees and their benefits through seasonal campaigns, community events, inclusive outreach, and regular surveys to track understanding and engagement across diverse audiences.

Strategic Action	Timeframe	Capacity & Partners	Metrics	Cost Range (\$-\$\$\$\$)
5.1.a: Report on UCFSP milestones via public informational sessions and newsletters.	1-3 years	Lake County Administration External Partners: Urban Forestry Coalition member organizations	Number of informational sessions held Attendance and audience diversity at sessions Number of newsletters developed and distributed	\$, over 10 years, starting in year 1
5.1.b: Run seasonal awareness campaigns tied to tree care activities (planting, watering, pruning), general tree appreciation, or focused on tree benefits that impact residents.	1-3 years	Lake County Administration Communications	Number of awareness campaigns developed and implemented	\$/year, starting in year 1
5.1.c: Celebrate trees by hosting and supporting Arbor Day activities throughout the County.	1-3 years	Lake County Administration External Partners Municipal partners Lake County Forest Preserve District	Number of Arbor Day events hosted or supported Number of participants attending Arbor Day activities Number of municipalities or organizations engaged in Arbor Day programming	\$/year, starting in year 1
5.1.d: Translate materials and adapt outreach to meet needs of all communities, including non-English speaking communities, low-literacy audiences, and historically excluded groups.	1-3 years	Lake County Administration	Number of translated outreach materials produced and distributed Number of languages covered in outreach	\$/year, starting in year 2
5.1.e: Conduct recurring community surveys (e.g., every 5 years) to assess changes in public perceptions of trees, awareness of urban forestry efforts, and interest in participating in tree-related programming.	3-5 years	Lake County Administration Communications External Partners Municipal partners Urban Forestry Coalition member organizations	Survey developed and deployed Number of survey responses collected each cycle Measurable changes in public awareness, perceptions of trees, and interest in tree-related activities compared to baseline	\$, one time cost, every 5 years, starting in year 5

Strategy 5.2: Equitably foster community engagement and tree care training

The County will foster equitable community engagement by partnering with local organizations to provide tree care training, tools, and volunteer opportunities, empowering residents, including youth, to actively support and maintain the urban forest.

Strategic Action	Timeframe	Capacity & Partners	Metrics	Cost Range (\$-\$\$\$\$)
5.2.a: Maintain an inventory of tree care and planting tools, materials, and supplies that can be used for County-supported workshops and training	1-3 years	<i>Lake County</i> Administration	Inventory created and maintained Number of workshops or trainings supported using County-provided tools and supplies	\$, one time cost in year 1
5.2.b: Co-create community tree care training and engagement opportunities through partnerships with local, neighborhood-based organizations in low-canopy and underserved areas.	1-3 years	<i>Lake County</i> Administration <i>External Partners</i> Municipal partners Lake County Forest Preserve District Community-based organizations Faith organizations	Number of tree care training and engagement opportunities co-created Number of participants trained	\$\$/year, starting in year 2
5.2.c: Collaborate with Openlands' TreeKeeper program to establish a pilot volunteer Tree Steward program in Lake County to care for trees on county-owned and -managed land. Train county residents in basic tree care (e.g. watering, mulching, light pruning). Collaborate with local municipalities for recruitment and deployment in communities that need added public tree care capacity. Extend this volunteer opportunity to youth in partnership with local school districts, educators, and library districts to offer tree care support on public school campuses across the county.	1-3 years	<i>Lake County</i> Administration <i>External Partners</i> Municipal partners Lake County Forest Preserve District	Number of Arbor Day events hosted or supported Number of participants attending Arbor Day activities Number of municipalities or organizations engaged in Arbor Day programming	\$/year, starting in year 1

Implementation Notes

Case Study: Hamilton County Tool Loan Program: The Hamilton County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) Tool Loan Program provides residents and community groups with access to essential landscaping and planting tools to support conservation and invasive species management activities (Hamilton SWCD 2025). Tools are loaned out on a scheduled basis, and participants are required to complete a liability waiver to ensure safe use and clarify responsibilities. By offering a structured loan system using a reputable and secure software and addressing liability concerns, the County reduces barriers for residents and local organizations, making it easier for community members to remove and manage invasive species.

Strategy 5.3: Build advocacy and local leadership for Urban Forestry

The County will build advocacy and local leadership by engaging elected officials, celebrating urban forestry successes, recognizing exemplary community contributions, and connecting tree initiatives to local identity and values.

Strategic Action	Timeframe	Capacity & Partners	Metrics	Cost Range (\$-\$\$\$)
5.3.a: Build relationships with elected officials at Lake County's municipalities to advocate for integrating trees into infrastructure, sustainability, development, and public health initiatives.	1-3 years	Lake County County Board Members Administration External Partners: Municipal partners	Number of municipalities reporting integration of trees into infrastructure, sustainability, development, or public health initiatives Number of elected officials publicly supporting or endorsing UCFSP initiatives	n/a
5.3.b: Celebrate urban forestry successes (e.g. UCFSP progress, municipal urban forestry updates, community engagement wins) publicly to create positive messaging around urban forestry in the county and to broaden community buy-in.	1-3 years	Lake County Administration	Number of success stories, updates, or case studies shared (via media, County website, or newsletters) Number of municipalities or partners featured in public recognition	\$, over 10 years
5.3.c: Develop and host an annual community recognition program or award series for residents, businesses, and/or community groups that model best practices in equitable community development using trees.	3-5 years	Lake County Administration External Partners Openlands	Recognition program launched and maintained Number of awardees recognized (residents, businesses, or community groups)	\$, over 5 years, starting in year 5
5.3.d: Collaborate with local artists, historians, and storytellers to connect urban forestry with community identity and values.	3-5 years	Lake County Administration External Partners Community development corporations Lake County community leaders Non-profit partners such as The Brushwood Center	Number of cultural or storytelling events/projects completed Audience size and diversity for cultural programming events	\$\$\$ /year, starting in year 5

Community feedback that supports these strategies

"Take tree care training to the residents at neighborhood events"

– Anonymous public meeting participant

"Use mailers to inform and target working class population who lack capacity to attend weekday events"

– Anonymous public meeting participant

"Make Arbor Day a holiday again by having a sapling festival/giveaway!"

– Anonymous survey respondent

"Host local events that highlight the importance of trees to the environment, with a focus on students in grades K–8."

– Anonymous survey respondent

"Explore volunteer opportunities that support residential tree maintenance."

– Anonymous survey respondent

"Keep trees in the conversation and educate on proper maintenance and care."

– Anonymous survey respondent

"Providing classes/outreach for residents to build the knowledge needed to effectively advocate for trees with municipal governments."

– Anonymous survey respondent

Working with Existing Programs and Partnerships

Successful implementation of Lake County's *Urban and Community Forestry Strategic Plan* depends on more than new policies or plantings—it requires harnessing the strengths of programs and partners already active in the region. Chicagoland is rich in academic institutions, professional associations, civic nonprofits, and municipal collaboratives with deep expertise in urban forestry, natural resource management, and environmental stewardship.

By coordinating with these established initiatives, Lake County can tailor proven programs to local needs, avoid duplication, and maximize limited resources. Partnerships offer opportunities to strengthen workforce pipelines, expand volunteer and education efforts, align with cutting-edge research, and support private land stewardship.

Appendix C provides a list of the programs and stakeholders identified for collaboration or to serve as inspiration for the creation of new programs. Working intentionally with these entities will allow the County to scale up capacity, accelerate implementation, and position itself as a hub for urban forestry innovation and leadership across municipalities.

Urban Forestry Funding Opportunities

A strong urban forestry program, regardless of community size or managing entity, depends on flexible and diverse funding sources. Programs that rely mainly on general fund allocations may struggle to maintain existing efforts or launch new initiatives. As the County, municipalities, and partners begin implementing the *Urban and Community Forestry Strategic Plan*, they will need to actively seek a range of funding opportunities to support trees as a way to advance environmental, public health, and local infrastructure goals.

State and Regional Grant Opportunities

The State of Illinois offers several targeted programs to support local urban forestry efforts:

- IDNR Urban and Community Forestry Assistance Grant Program provides financial assistance to local units of government for the development of local and community forestry programs that establish, manage, conserve and preserve urban forests.
- Chicago Region Trees Initiative administers grants to communities in the seven-county Chicago region to enhance urban and community forestry efforts by funding projects such as tree planting, canopy assessments, and urban forest management plans.
- Trees Forever's Illinois Community Canopy Tree Planting Grant provides funding to help strengthen and build urban forests in low canopy, underserved communities.
- The Open Space Land Acquisition and Development Program is administered by IDNR and provides grants to local governments for the acquisition and development of land for public parks and recreations purposes. While not exclusively focused on urban forestry, this program can support projects that enhance and expand green spaces and tree canopy coverage.

Federal Funding Sources

Federal programs provide substantial resources for communities that frame urban forestry as

part of climate adaptation, hazard mitigation, or water management:

- EPA Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF) offers low-interest loans and grants for projects that improve water quality through habitat restoration and green infrastructure.
- FEMA's Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) program funds nature-based hazard mitigation strategies, including tree planting and urban green stormwater systems.
- National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Five Star and Urban Waters Restoration Grant supports community-led restoration projects that combine native planting, public engagement, and watershed health.
- EPA Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) partners with other federal agencies to fund and support initiatives that address the region's biggest threats to the Great Lakes ecosystem and associated human health issues.

Dedicated state and federal grants specifically for urban forestry remain limited and highly competitive. However, urban forests deliver benefits that intersect with many other pressing public needs—stormwater management, air-quality improvement and pollution mitigation, neighborhood cooling, public health, and overall economic vitality. Because trees and green infrastructure contribute directly to these outcomes, funding sources aimed at stormwater infrastructure, air-quality improvements, climate resilience, transportation, public health, and community development can legitimately support urban forestry activities.

By framing urban forest projects in terms of these co-benefits, the County can broaden its eligibility for diverse funding streams—including environmental and infrastructure grants, public-health initiatives, climate or resilience funds, and economic development programs—rather than relying solely on limited “urban forestry” allocations. This approach increases the likelihood of securing sustained funding for tree planting, maintenance, and management while also demonstrating the multifaceted value of the urban forest to the community.

Chapter 4: **How Are We Doing?**

Measuring Success and Key Performance Indicators

Evaluating the implementation of the *Urban and Community Forestry Strategic Plan* over the next decade will be essential to ensuring progress, accountability, and adaptability. A clear framework for measuring success will allow the County and its partners to track achievements, identify challenges, and adjust strategies as needed. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) will serve as the primary tool for assessing outcomes, providing a consistent and transparent way to gauge the *Urban and Community Forestry Strategic Plan*'s impact over time.

Key Performance Indicators

Each implementation goal includes KPIs – high-level, outcome-focused measures designed to evaluate overall progress toward five overarching strategic priorities:

- **Strategic Priority 1: Collaborate**
- **Strategic Priority 2: Plant**
- **Strategic Priority 3: Cultivate**
- **Strategic Priority 4: Train**
- **Strategic Priority 5: Educate**

Each KPI is reviewed annually through internal tracking systems and summarized in public-facing reports such as the *State of the Urban Forest Annual Report*. A more comprehensive KPI review will be conducted every five years, aligned with tree canopy updates and strategic plan evaluations.

Strategic Priority 1: Collaborate

This priority is advanced through leadership and collaboration, which helps to position the County as a convener of regional partners; capacity building and knowledge sharing, which strengthens collective expertise; and policy alignment and funding, which creates the foundation for scaling urban forestry action across the region.

Strategic Priority 1: Key Performance Indicators

Leadership and Collaboration

Number of active partners and meetings

Capacity Building and knowledge sharing

Number of staff/municipalities trained or using shared resources

Policy alignment and funding

Number of policies adopted or funding secured

Strategic Priority 2: Plant

This priority is measured through canopy growth and tree survival, which measures both the scale of annual planting efforts and the long-term success of newly planted trees. It is also advanced through municipal and program adoption, as communities embrace canopy targets, management plans, and data reporting.

Strategic Priority 2: Key Performance Indicators

Canopy Growth and Tree Survival
Total number of trees planted annually (all programs)

Percent of planted trees surviving past the 3–5-year establishment period

Municipal and Program Adoption
Number of municipalities adopting canopy/planting targets, management plans or contributing to the annual report

Strategic Priority 3: Cultivate

This priority is driven by regional coordination, with the development of a countywide invasive species dashboard and identification of priority invasive species management zones to guide action. It is further strengthened by municipal and community engagement, as grants, projects, and replacement plantings transform invasive removal into opportunities for a more diverse and climate-resilient urban forest.

Strategic Priority 3: Key Performance Indicators

Regional Coordination
Completion of Countywide invasive species dashboard

Identification of priority management zones

Municipal and Community Engagement Action
Number of grants and projects dedicated to invasive species removal

Number of native and climate-adapted trees and shrubs planted to replace removed non-native, invasive plants

Strategic Priority 4: Train

The development of career pathways, supported by partnerships with employers and training providers across the County, can open doors in urban forestry to job seekers in Lake County. This priority is also strengthened by program outcomes and workforce skill building, as training, certification, and strong employment retention help to ensure a skilled workforce prepared to meet the future urban forestry needs of Lake County’s communities.

Strategic Priority 4: Key Performance Indicators

Career Pathways in Urban Forestry
Number of partnerships with employers and training partners

Program Outcomes and Workforce Skill Building
Number of participants trained or certified

Participant employment and retention rates in urban forestry roles

Strategic Priority 5: Educate

Public awareness, engagement, and recognition, in the form of messaging campaigns, tree-focused events and celebrations, and community-based education and award programs, highlight the value of urban forestry while inspiring broader participation. This priority is also carried forward through volunteerism and stewardship, with activated residents directly involved in planting and caring for trees.

Strategic Priority 5: Key Performance Indicators

Public Awareness, Engagement and Recognition
Number of awareness campaigns, events, and community workshops

Number of recognition programs, awards, or creative projects celebrating urban forestry successes

Volunteerism and Stewardship
Number of residents actively taking part in tree care throughout the county



Plan Review, Progress Reporting, and Adaptive Management

The Lake County *Urban and Community Forestry Strategic Plan* is intended to be a living document that adapts as conditions, priorities, and opportunities change. Over its 10-year horizon, the *Urban and Community Forestry Strategic Plan* will remain responsive to new data, shifting community needs, and emerging challenges such as climate impacts, budget changes, or development pressures. To stay effective, it will consistently revisit four core questions:

- What do we have? (baseline conditions and updated data)
- What do we want? (long-term vision and measurable goals)
- How do we get there? (strategic actions and implementation tools)
- How are we doing? (performance evaluation and accountability)

Regular Review and Evaluation Process

To stay aligned with community values and resource realities, Lake County will track progress annually and conduct a deeper, comprehensive review every few years.

Annual Progress Tracking

Each year, the County will:

- Track strategy-specific metrics and key performance indicators (KPIs).
- Document major milestones—such as projects completed, trees planted, staff hired, and funding secured.
- Publish a public-facing *State of the Urban Forest* annual report summarizing accomplishments, performance, and challenges.
- Use dashboards or infographics to communicate progress clearly to residents and stakeholders.

These updates will inform budgeting and program work plans for the following year.

Three-Year Comprehensive Review

Every three years, the County will:

- Analyze the latest data on canopy cover, tree health, equity, and community engagement.
- Evaluate progress against KPIs and adjust strategies or resource allocations as needed.
- Engage staff, partners, and the public to realign priorities with current needs and opportunities.
- Release a Progress Report and Plan Update Addendum documenting revisions and next-phase priorities.

Public Communication and Engagement

Transparency and community trust are essential to success. Throughout implementation, the County will:

- Host periodic public meetings or webinars to share updates and gather input.
- Maintain a dedicated web page with dashboards, reports, and opportunities to participate.
- Use surveys and other tools to gauge public perception of urban forestry programs and adapt messaging accordingly.

Appendix A: **Glossary**

Block group: A federally defined geographic area that is variable in size and typically contains between 600–3,000 people.

Carbon sequestration: The removal of carbon from the atmosphere to be stored within tree tissues.

Census tract: A federally defined geographic area that is a subdivision of a county; it typically contains between 1,200–8,000 people.

Diversity: Variety within a population of organisms.

Equity: Equal access within a community to the same benefits, opportunities, and outcomes, factoring in systemic inequalities.

Geographic information systems (GIS): Technology that is used to capture, store, manipulate, analyze, and display geographic data.

Land use: Describes the human use of land for cultural and economic purposes.

Possible planting area: An area of land where it is possible to plant trees; excludes places where tree canopy would conflict with existing land uses.

Priority planting analysis: A process to rank possible tree planting area based on the potential for trees to benefit the environment, human health, and social equity.

Resilience: The ability to withstand and recover from stressors such as pests, diseases, and drought.

Stewardship: The responsible care and management of a resource.

Stormwater runoff: Surface water that is not absorbed after a rainstorm or snow melt that flows into local waterways.

Tree: A woody plant that reaches a height of 15 feet or more at maturity.

Tree benefit: A service that trees provide that improves the environment for people, plants, and wildlife.

Tree canopy: The upper layer of foliage and branches of trees as seen from above.

Tree canopy change: A measure of how tree canopy cover differs from one point in time to another, expressed in acres and/or as a percentage.

Tree canopy cover: The amount of land that is covered by tree canopy as seen from above, expressed as a percentage of the total land area.

Urban forest: The collection of trees growing along streets, in public parks and natural areas, and in the yards of homes, schools, and businesses.

Urban heat island: Urban areas that experience higher temperatures than nearby rural areas due to buildings and paved surfaces that trap and hold heat.

Vulnerability: Being susceptible to damage or harm.

Appendix B: References

Berland, A., S. A. Shiflett, W. D. Shuster, A. S. Garmestani, H. C. Goddard, D. L. Herrmann, and M. E. Hopton. 2017. "The Role of Trees in Urban Stormwater Management." *Landscape and Urban Planning* 162: 167–177. Accessed October 3, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landurbplan.2017.02.017>

Brandt, Leslie A., Abigail Derby Lewis, Lydia Scott, Lindsay Darling, Robert T. Fahey, Louis Iverson, David J. Nowak, Allison R. Bodine, Andrew Bell, Shannon Still, Patricia R. Butler, Andrea Dierich, Stephen D. Handler, Maria K. Janowiak, Stephen N. Matthews, Jason W. Miesbauer, Matthew Peters, Anantha Prasad, P. Danielle Shannon, Douglas Stotz, and Christopher W. Swanston. 2017. *Chicago Wilderness Region Urban Forest Vulnerability Assessment and Synthesis: A Report from the Urban Forestry Climate Change Response Framework Chicago Wilderness Pilot Project*. General Technical Report NRS-168. Newtown Square, PA: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Northern Research Station. <https://doi.org/10.2737/NRS-GTR-168>

City of Philadelphia. 2021. Philadelphia Climate Action Playbook. Philadelphia: Greenworks Philadelphia. <https://www.phila.gov/media/20210113125627/Philadelphia-Climate-Action-Playbook.pdf>

Donovan, Geoffrey H., and David T. Butry. "Trees in the City: Valuing Street Trees in Portland, Oregon." *Landscape and Urban Planning* 94, no. 2 (2010): 77–83. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landurbplan.2009.07.019>.

Dwyer, John F., and David J. Nowak. 2000. "A National Assessment of the Urban Forest: An Overview." *Proceedings of the Society of American Foresters 1999 National Convention*, Portland, OR, September 11–15, 1999. Bethesda, MD: Society of American Foresters.

Fang, C.-F., and D. L. Ling. 2005. "Guidance for Noise Reduction Provided by Tree Belts." *Landscape and Urban Planning* 71: 29–34. Accessed October 6, 2025. https://d1wqtxts1xzle7.cloudfront.net/77588479/2005-Guidance_for_noise_reduction_provided_by_tree_belts-libre.pdf

Ford, Trent. Climate Change: Impacts and Costs to Illinois Communities. Prairie Research Institute, 2021. https://stateclimatologist.web.illinois.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/PRI_ClimateChange.pdf

Friends of the Chicago River. 2025. "Litter Free Supply Stations." *Get Involved / Volunteer / Take Action to Support a Litter-Free Chicago-Calumet River System*. Accessed September 15, 2025. <https://www.chicagoriver.org/get-involved/volunteer/take-action-to-support-a-litter-free-chicago-calumet-river-system/litter-free-supply-stations>

Hamilton County Invasive Species. "Invasive Species Trade-In Program." Accessed October 6, 2025. <https://www.hcinvasives.org/trade.html#:~:text=To%20participate%2C%20you%20must:%20%20Identify%2C%20remove%2C,bush%20%20Japanese%20barberry%20%20Norway%20maple>

Hamilton Soil & Water Conservation District. "Tool Loan Program." Accessed October 6, 2025. <https://www.hamiltonswcd.org/toolloan.html>

Illinois Department of Natural Resources. 2021. Community Accomplishments Reporting System (CARS) Manual: CARS Map Manual: An IDNR Urban and Community Forestry Accomplishments Tool. Springfield, IL: Illinois Department of Natural Resources. <https://dnr.illinois.gov/content/dam/soi/en/web/dnr/conservation/forestry/urbanforestry/documents/final-cars-manual-by-sravva.pdf>

Johnson, Zachary S., Koski, T., and O'Conner, A. 2017. *The Hidden Value of Landscapes*. Fort Collins, CO: Colorado State University. Accessed October 6, 2025. http://webdoc.agsci.colostate.edu/hortla/Colorado_Water_2017.pdf

Lake County Forest Preserves. 2025. "Happening in Conservation." *What We Do – Conservation*. Libertyville, IL: Lake County Forest Preserves. Accessed September 16, 2025. <https://www.lcfpd.org/what-we-do/conservation>

Medina County Soil & Water Conservation District. 2025. "Medina County Invasive Species Buy-Back Program." Medina, Ohio: Medina County Soil & Water Conservation District. Accessed September 15, 2025. <https://medinaswcd.org/gallery-pear/>

Morton Arboretum. 2020 *Chicago Region Tree Census Report*. Lisle, IL: Morton Arboretum, 2020. Accessed August 11, 2025. https://mortonarb.org/app/uploads/2021/05/2020-Chicago-Region-Tree-Census-Report__FIN.pdf

Morton Arboretum. 2020 *Tree Census Report: County Data and Change Analysis*. Lisle, IL: Morton Arboretum, 2022. Accessed August 11, 2025. https://mortonarb.org/app/uploads/2022/09/2020_Tree-Census-Report_County-Data-and-Change-Analysis.pdf

Nawrath, Maximilian, Ingo Kowarik, and Leonie K. Fischer. 2019. "The Influence of Green Streets on Cycling Behavior in European Cities." *Landscape and Urban Planning* 190: 103598. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landurbplan.2019.103598>

Nowak, David J., and Eric J. Greenfield. "US Urban Forest Statistics, Values, and Projections." *Journal of Forestry* 116, no. 2 (2018): 164–177. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jofore/fvx004>.

Nowak, D. J., Daniel E. Crane, and Jack C. Stevens. 2006. "Air Pollution Removal by Urban Trees and Shrubs in the United States." *Urban Forestry & Urban Greening* 4: 115–123. Accessed October 3, 2025. https://www.fs.usda.gov/ne/newtown_square/publications/other_publishers/OCR/ne_2006_nowak001.pdf

Simpson, J. R., and E. G. McPherson. 2001. "Tree Planting to Optimize Energy and CO₂ Benefits." In *Investing in Natural Capital: Proceedings of the 2001 National Urban Forest Conference*, edited by C. Kollin, September 5–8, 2001, Washington, DC.

Tree Equity Score. "Methods & Data." Accessed October 6, 2025. <https://www.treeequityscore.org/methodology>.

Tree Equity Score – National Explorer. Accessed September 15, 2025. <https://www.treeequityscore.org/map>

U.S. Census Bureau. 2022. "Glossary." Census.Gov. April 11, 2022. <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/geography/about/glossary.html>.

U.S. Census Bureau. 2025. "Lake County, Illinois: Profile." *Data.Census.Gov*. Accessed September 16, 2025. https://data.census.gov/profile/Lake_County,_Illinois?g=050XX00US17097

U.S. Department of Energy. 2025. Energy-Efficient Landscaping. Accessed October 6, 2025. <https://www.energy.gov/energysaver/energy-efficient-landscaping>

U.S. Forest Service. 2021. *i-Tree Eco v6 Field Manual*. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service. <https://www.itreetools.org/documents/274/EcoV6.FieldManual.2021.10.06.pdf>

Village of Glenview. 2025. "Buckthorn Removal Incentive Program." Village of Glenview, Illinois. Accessed September 15, 2025. <https://www.glenview.il.us/buckthorn>

Wolf, Kathleen L. "City Trees and Property Values." *Arborist News* 16, no. 4 (2007): 34–36.

Wolf, K. L., S. Krueger, and M. A. Rozance. 2014. "Stress, Wellness & Physiology – A Literature Review." In *Green Cities: Good Health*. College of the Environment, University of Washington. Accessed October 6, 2025. <https://www.greenhealth.washington.edu>

Wuebbles, Donald J., James Randal Angel, Karen Petersen, and A. Maria Lemke, eds. An Assessment of the Impacts of Climate Change in Illinois. The Nature Conservancy, Illinois, 2021. https://doi.org/10.13012/B2IDB-1260194_V1

Appendix C: **Urban Forest Stakeholders & Programs**

The Chicagoland region is home to a diverse ecosystem of organizations with deep expertise in urban forestry, natural resources management, and environmental stewardship. Academic institutions, professional associations, civic nonprofits, and municipal collaboratives all contribute specialized knowledge and resources that can advance training, education, outreach, and workforce development.

For Lake County, the challenge and opportunity, is not only to recognize these existing efforts but to strategically connect and coordinate with them. Collaboration with these regional and national leaders will allow the County to tailor proven programs to local needs, avoid duplication, and maximize the impact of limited resources. By aligning with initiatives that already complement the County's priorities, Lake County can expand its reach, accelerate program development, and ensure its urban forestry efforts are both efficient and sustainable.

By leveraging the existing ecosystem of regional and national players already investing in and implementing urban forestry programming, the County can offer a greater range of resources and support.

The stakeholders highlighted in this section represent key partners for the County’s Urban Forest Strategic Plan. They bring capacity in training, outreach, volunteer engagement, workforce pipelines, and private landowner support. Working in partnership with these entities will help Lake County:

- Build a stronger workforce pipeline by connecting students and young professionals to conservation and arboriculture careers.
- Expand community engagement by coordinating with volunteer, education, and stewardship programs that are already active in the region.
- Leverage technical expertise by aligning County operations with research institutions, training providers, and professional associations.
- Support private land stewardship through incentive programs, outreach campaigns, and technical assistance for invasive species management and tree care.

Through intentional coordination with these partners, Lake County can position itself as a hub for urban forestry innovation and leadership, bridging gaps between local jurisdictions and scaling up resources for residents and communities. This list is by no means exhaustive but serves as a guide to begin collaboration and partnerships that will continue to evolve.

Training & Engagement for Community & Civic Volunteers

Stakeholder / Program	Description
The Morton Arboretum	The Arboretum offers a variety of volunteer opportunities in areas such as horticulture, natural areas restoration, research, and visitor services. Volunteers support conservation efforts, special events, and educational programs.
Chicago Botanic Garden’s Certification Program	The Ornamental Plant Materials Certificate (OPC) program offers in-depth training on native and ornamental plants suited for northeastern Illinois, emphasizing plant identification, care, and landscape use. Designed for aspiring and current green-industry professionals, the program includes hands-on garden learning and requires no prior horticulture experience.
The Arbor Day Foundation Tree City USA Program	Recognizes and supports municipalities committed to urban forestry by meeting four core standards for tree care, management, tree planting, maintenance, and advocacy. Over 3,500 cities participate.
The Arbor Day Foundation Tree Campus Higher Education Program	Provides colleges and universities with a framework towards developing a sustainable campus forestry program.
Evanston Ecology Center Seasonal Programs	Interactive nature and outdoor activities, local wildlife and seasonal themes. Examples include an Egg Hunt in March, an Earth Day Celebration in April, and a Harvest Fest in September.

Training & Education Opportunities for County Staff & Contractors

Stakeholder / Program	Description
Metropolitan Mayors Caucus Greenest Region Compact (GRC)	A sustainability framework adopted by municipalities across the Chicago region to align local actions with regional, national, and global environmental goals. GRC implementation may engage residents in sustainability planning.
The Green Macomb Urban Forest Partnership	Supports tree canopy expansion in Macomb County, Michigan by providing technical tools, resources, and funding connections for local forestry programs. The Partnership encourages community involvement by providing opportunities for citizens to contribute and plant trees on private property.
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign; Illinois Extension Community Tree Care Series	This hybrid training program includes six live winter webinars held twice a month from January through March, each covering two topics and concluding with an interactive tree health photo discussion. Topics range from tree identification and proper planting techniques to site and species selection and tree care. Illinois Extension also offers a Master Naturalist program that promotes stewardship of nature through education and hands-on training.
Illinois Arborist Association and CRTI Urban Forestry Basic Training	A two-day workshop designed for non-arborists who work with or near trees or oversee tree-related work. Participants learn arboriculture fundamentals such as planting, pruning, tree biology, and tree care, with an optional second day focused on basic chainsaw skills.
Morton Arboretum Natural Areas Conservation Training (N-ACT) Program	Provides in-depth training and certification in ecological restoration for individuals looking to care for natural areas. Participants learn about plant identification, invasive species management, and restoration techniques.
Urban and Community Forestry Society	Formerly the Society of Municipal Arborists, UCFS is a professional affiliate of the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) that supports urban forestry professionals through education, networking, and professional development. UCFS provides technical resources for those managing trees in urban environments through an annual conference, the Municipal Forestry Institute leadership training, peer-to-peer learning opportunities, the arborist exchange program, and City Trees magazine.
Illinois Arborist Association Urban Forest Strike Team	A volunteer program managed by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources to assist communities in assessing tree damage after disasters. Eligible volunteers receive specialized training to support urban forest recovery efforts.

Specialized Programming to Support High School Students

Stakeholder / Program	Description
Forest Preserves of Cook County Youth Outdoor Ambassador Program	A paid summer internship that provides hands-on conservation experience for people aged 16 to 22. Participants assist with environmental stewardship projects, nature education, and public events, and are exposed to careers in conservation.
Forest Preserves of Cook County Conservation Corps Programs	Paid summer opportunities for high school students and recent graduates to gain hands-on experience in conservation work. Participants work on projects such as trail maintenance, and invasive species removal while developing job skills in environmental careers.
The Morton Arboretum Research Technician Fellowship	Undergraduate and high school students gain paid, hands-on experience in scientific research in the lab and in the field. Participants work alongside Arboretum scientists on projects related to climate change, biodiversity, and natural resource management.
Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) Summer Conservation Program	Provides young adults in Lake County with hands-on experience in conservation work and environmental stewardship. Participants work on natural areas stewardship projects while gaining job skills and exploring environmental and conservation careers.
Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) Urban and Community Forestry Program, Discontinued	A paid six-month urban forestry training program for 16–24-year-olds. Participants are trained in tree maintenance, plant identification, invasive species impacts, and other skills. Certifications and licenses can be earned, adding value to the experience for those interested in additional growth and job preparedness.
The Morton Arboretum Youth Volunteer Opportunities	Participants assist with plant care, ecological restoration, and educational programs while gaining hands-on experience in environmental stewardship.
Ancient Oaks Foundation Environmental Scholarship	Available to students pursuing careers in environmental or natural sciences. Applicants must plan to attend a college or university and study in an environmental field.
Student Conservation Association Chicago Urban Green Program	Paid and volunteer opportunities for young people to engage in urban forestry, habitat restoration, and environmental conservation. Participants gain hands-on experience in tree planting, trail work, and ecological restoration while developing career readiness skills.

Outreach And Education Programs Targeting Private Lands

Stakeholder / Program	Description
Ancient Oaks Foundation Buckthorn Bounty Program	A program incentivizing private landowners to remove buckthorn on their property, with up to \$150 in payments. Participants also receive guidance, support, and resources.
Lake County Forest Preserves Private Landowner Invasive Species Resources	Lake County Forest Preserves provides education, technical assistance, presentations, and incentives to help private landowners remove invasive species on their property.
Greater Chicago Watershed Alliance, formerly Calumet Stormwater Collaborative	Works to improve stormwater management in the Chicago Region through coordinated planning, funding, and green infrastructure initiatives. The initiative recognizes that private landowners play an important role in addressing stormwater challenges.
StormStore™	A stormwater credit trading market in Cook County. Private landowners, along with developers and public entities, can generate and sell stormwater credits by implementing voluntary green infrastructure projects, creating financial incentives for green stormwater management across the County.
Openlands Lands in Harmony Program	A program providing Lake County property owners with guidance on conservation-friendly landscaping practices. The program includes low-cost consulting, plant sales, and resources on native plants, buckthorn removal, and oak planting.

Workforce Development in Arboriculture & Urban Forestry

Stakeholder / Program	Description
Openlands Arborist Registered Apprenticeship	A three-year paid training program administered by Openlands in partnership with the Department of Labor and industry partners in the Chicago region. Apprentices gain hands-on experience, industry credentials, and professional training from ISA Certified Arborists, preparing them for careers in arboriculture and urban forestry.
Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity CEJA Workforce Training Programs	Training and certification programs for clean energy jobs, including solar, wind, energy efficiency, and EV maintenance. Thirteen Workforce Hubs across Illinois support job training and placement.
College of Lake County Arboriculture Career Certificate	A one-year program that trains students in tree pruning, climbing, and evaluation of tree health, pests, and diseases. Graduates are prepared for entry-level roles.
https://www.clcillinois.edu/programs/biodv/horticulture/arboriculture-career-certificate	Provides young adults in Lake County with hands-on experience in conservation work and environmental stewardship. Participants work on natural areas stewardship projects while gaining job skills and exploring environmental and conservation careers.
American Climate Corps, Discontinued	The American Climate Corps (ACC), launched in September 2023, was a national service program aimed at training young people for climate-related jobs, including renewable energy installation, ecosystem restoration, and wildfire prevention. Discontinued in January 2025.
Chicago Botanic Garden CLM Internship Program	This program places early-career professionals in seasonal conservation and land management positions on federal and non-federal agency projects. Interns gain hands-on experience in applied ecology, plant population monitoring, and land management while receiving training and networking opportunities.
Forest Preserves of Cook County Adult Conservation Corps Programs	Paid, hands-on training in ecological restoration, forestry, and conservation.
Imani Green Health Advocates	Career training in urban forestry for residents of Chicago's South Side.

Workforce Development in Arboriculture & Urban Forestry (continued)

Stakeholder / Program	Description
ISA Michigan Chapter Tree Work 101: Getting Started in Arboriculture	A nine-day introductory course covering groundwork, climbing, aerial lift, and rescue skills.
Openlands TreeKeepers® Certification Program	A month-long training in urban forestry advocacy and fundamentals, such as tree identification, planting, and care.
Illinois Arborist Association Advanced Training Program	Specialized courses for arborists to expand expertise in areas such as pest management, tree selection, tree worker safety, and urban forestry.
College of DuPage Sustainable Landscapes Certificate	A vocational certificate program that provides students with knowledge and skills in sustainable landscaping principles. Students cover topics like green roofs, sustainable landscape design, landscaping for wildlife, perennial plant communities, and water use and conservation, along with an internship to apply these practices in the field.
Chicago Botanic Garden Stewardship and Ecology of Natural Areas (SENA) Internship Program	Paid, full-time positions in natural areas stewardship. Interns work alongside Garden ecologists on restoration projects while training ecological management, inclusive leadership, and career development.
Gateway Technical College Arborist Apprenticeship Program	A three-year Wisconsin-based training program combining classroom instruction with paid on-the-job training. Apprentices gain skills in tree care, pruning, removal, pest management, and equipment operation, leading to Arborist Journey worker status.

Efforts To Engage Low-Canopy Neighborhoods

Stakeholder / Program	Description
Metropolitan Mayors Caucus Chicago Regional Climate Action Plan	Emphasizes urban tree cover as a strategy for climate resilience, reducing heat exposure, and improving air quality. Community engagement and education is specifically stated as an adaptation objective.
Friends of Grand Rapids Parks ArborFest	An annual Michigan community tree planting event adding hundreds of trees to an under-resourced neighborhood each year. The event engages volunteers, local sponsors, and community partners.