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SUMMARY

This agenda item is informational and intended to provide a brief overview to the Board of Forestry (Board) about the Department’s Urban and Community Forestry (UCF) Program activities and accomplishments since the last report in November 2021.

CONTEXT

The mission of the UCF Program is to advance equity, well-being, and resilience for all people in Oregon by promoting sustainable investment in trees and green infrastructure. As a work unit within the Forest Resources Division, the UCF team is committed to the [Collective Impact Model](#) and is using a “whole systems approach” in its work to address the many pressing problems facing the state. This proactive strategy seeks to prevent or cure rather than merely react to problems.

The program is directed by and operates under the authority of ORS 526.505, which states:

Trees not only are important to the economic and environmental well-being of Oregon, but also represent a significant component of the quality of life for urban residents. As a matter of policy, it is important to promote and protect the human habitat values that accrue from a healthy urban forest. Therefore, it is declared to be the public policy of the State of Oregon to encourage cities to plant and properly care for trees within the cities’ urban growth boundaries and develop management plans to protect and promote urban forests. [1993 c.347 §3]

Program direction also comes from ORS 526.510, which states:

(1) The State Forestry Department shall provide technical assistance to cities, counties, other governmental units, nonprofit and civic organizations and other groups interested in planting and caring for trees in communities. Technical assistance may include, but is not limited to, the following areas:

- (a) Establishing and maintaining local urban and community forestry programs;*
- (b) Developing local tree management ordinances;*
- (c) Developing public information programs to promote awareness of the values and benefits of the urban forest as a resource of the urban community;*
- (d) Implementing appropriate tree management and care practices;*

- (e) Performing street tree inventories; and*
- (f) Planning and coordinating local tree planting projects.*

(2) The department shall make the fullest use of cooperative agreements, projects and resource sharing with local grassroots organizations, community action groups, businesses, local and state agencies, federal agencies, public and private schools, colleges and universities in designing, developing and implementing local programs, plans and activities. [1993 c.347 §4]

In 2021, the Board [adopted the Climate Change and Carbon Plan](#), which notes that one important goal for addressing climate change and promoting carbon capture is to “*increase the extent and resilience of urban and community forests to maximize the climate mitigation and health benefits of the urban forest canopy.*”

[Oregon’s 20-Year Landscape Resiliency Strategy](#) also articulates “*a shared vision of healthy and resilient forested ecosystems, vibrant local economies, healthy watersheds with functional aquatic habitat, and quality outdoor opportunities for all Oregonians.*”

Lastly, the Board and ODF’s draft strategic plan, [A Vision For Oregon’s Forests](#) (June 2024) highlights the need for Climate-smart Forestry and the fact that “*Addressing the management needs related to climate change requires a holistic approach that considers adaptation, mitigation and the social dimension of forestry, which includes community and economic aspects.*”

The main takeaway from these ODF plans is that forests, especially urban and community forests, are highly complex social-ecological systems that must be planned and managed accordingly, using adaptive and place-based decision-making, grounded in sound science. Another key takeaway is that “*people’s actions are critically important to the continued resilience and adaptive capacity of forest ecosystems...*”. Recognizing that a hands-off approach will not work, intentional planning, meaningful engagement, and management are essential.

BACKGROUND AND ANALYSIS

ODF’s Urban and Community Forestry (UCF) Program has successfully engaged with Oregon municipalities, universities, nonprofits, and residents for 33 years and counting. The UCF Program specializes in providing technical support, education and outreach, and financial assistance to help communities throughout the state better manage their trees and forests.

In 2023, the US Forest Service (USFS) announced several large Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) funded grant opportunities to enhance forest resilience in the face of climate change and promote equitable access to the benefits provided by trees. The USFS awarded \$250 million (M) nationally to state urban and community forestry programs and \$1.13 billion in additional funding through a competitive grant process open to all eligible entities. The UCF unit applied for, and was awarded, over \$27M in Federal grants through the BIL and IRA. Although a portion of these funds is for ODF staff and contractors to develop, implement, and administer program initiatives, the vast majority will flow directly to disadvantaged communities.

The UCF Program received \$26.6M in IRA grant funding to set up two distinct programs. The first grant program devotes \$10M specifically to the nine Federally Recognized Tribes in Oregon, and the second grant program opens \$12.5M to all eligible entities in the state of Oregon. These grants are intended to foster 1) increased and more equitable access to urban tree canopy, 2) broadened community engagement in urban and community forest planning, tree planting, and management activities, and 3) improved urban and community forest health and resilience. The overarching goal is to promote urban and community forest investment and tree equity for overburdened and underserved communities throughout the state. The primary objectives of these grant programs will be to:

- *Support urban and community forestry assessment, planning, and prioritization;*
- *Support culturally responsive urban and community forestry education, engagement, immersive/experiential outdoor recreation, and community-building initiatives;*
- *Build capacity with collective impact through an interdisciplinary UCF network;*
- *Support urban and community forestry workforce development and diversification;*
- *Significantly expand urban and community forestry tree production, planting, and maintenance; and*
- *Support urban and community forestry monitoring, adaptive management, and lesson sharing.*

Additionally, during the 2023 legislative session the Climate Resilience Package (HB3409) passed. Among other things, this legislation declares a climate emergency and establishes a Community Green Infrastructure Fund, which will be administered by the Department of Land Conservation and Development (DLCD) with input and assistance from ODF's UCF team. HB3409 also directs ODF to stand up a program to provide technical and financial assistance to public bodies, Tribal Governments, watershed councils, and community-based organizations for planning for, responding to, and recovering from damage to habitats and urban trees due to pests, diseases, or other natural or human-created conditions that might lead to loss of tree canopy. Lastly, this legislation directs ODF to acquire and maintain a publicly accessible, online urban tree canopy assessment tool for the entire state. This tool will be essential for understanding the complex relationships between Oregon's urban forest conditions and its sociodemographic situation.

Programmatic updates and noteworthy UCF activities include the following:

- 1) **Staffing Update:** The UCF Program has historically been a small, two- to three-person team. Thanks to Federal and State investments in urban and community forestry over the past year, the UCF unit now consists of 9 employees allowing for far greater service capacity.
- 2) **IRA Grant Subaward Programs:** The UCF team has set up a comprehensive [grant subaward website](#), issued two Calls for Proposals (one for the [Tribal Governments Subaward Program](#) and one for the [All Entities Subaward Program](#)), created an [online grant application portal](#), and hosted several informational webinars about the new programs. UCF staff are actively consulting with prospective grant applicants and have invested quite a bit of time in establishing foundational contracts and agreements with contractors, consultants, and agency partners. The first round of Tribal Government awards will be announced before the end of the

year and the first round of the All Entities awards will be announced in January 2025. This fall, the UCF team will work with a consultant to conduct a comprehensive baseline assessment of current urban forest conditions throughout Oregon. This “state of urban and community forestry” assessment will capture information about the social, ecological, and economic dimensions within the state and will be repeated every two years to track change over time.

- 3) **HB3409-related Projects:** As directed by the Legislature, the UCF team has been closely collaborating with DLCD staff to help them design and implement the \$6.5M Community Green Infrastructure Grant (CGIG) Program. Staff from both departments have been meeting regularly over the past year, and recently executed a formal interagency agreement (IAA) between the two agencies. The UCF Program will share access to its grant management software and application portal with DLCD in order to keep the CGIG administration process as efficient and user-friendly as possible. UCF staff have recently developed a GIS mapping tool and determined a methodology to define green infrastructure improvement zones, as required by HB3409. The UCF team has also been working to execute a contract to develop the statewide urban tree canopy assessment tool mandated by HB3409. The aim is to have an integrated statewide urban tree inventory and canopy assessment tool up and running by the end of the year.
- 4) **EAB/MOB Support and Coordination:** UCF staff have been key players in the State’s response to two destructive forest insects, emerald ash borer (EAB) and Mediterranean oak borer (MOB), closely coordinating with ODF’s Forest Health & Monitoring team, ODA, and many local entities throughout Oregon. UCF staff have been helping to lead the charge in strategic communication and outreach for both EAB and MOB, ensuring that local entities are well-connected and well-informed in their responses to these pests.

Since EAB was first detected in Oregon in 2022, UCF staff have:

- Played a leading role on the statewide EAB Taskforce and Steering Committee;
- Helped conduct regular EAB subcommittee meetings among technical and communications experts from Washington County/Portland Metro governments, organizations, and private companies;
- Delivered dozens of EAB presentations and trainings to various professional audiences and the general public;
- Developed informational materials including an EAB pocket guide and EAB insecticide factsheet;
- Distributed thousands of copies of informational materials to local partners; and
- Worked to develop a new, fully integrated and comprehensive statewide EAB website to be managed and maintained indefinitely by UCF.

- 5) **Urban Wood and Woody Biomass Utilization:** In light of the climate crisis, the need to sequester carbon wherever possible, and the prospect of many dead and dying trees Oregonians will soon have to contend with as a result of EAB & MOB (and likely other pests & pathogens as well), the UCF team recognizes how important it will be in the years ahead to help advance statewide efforts in urban wood and woody biomass utilization. Currently, the vast majority of

urban trees removed in the state are underutilized resources by being chipped, burned, or landfilled. UCF staff have been partnering with numerous organizations, consultants, institutions, and companies to identify and help implement strategies for improving the environmental, economic, and social performance of Oregon's urban wood and woody biomass supply chain.

In conclusion, the UCF Program is well positioned to effectively tackle pressing challenges facing communities throughout the state.

RECOMMENDATION

This is an information item.

NEXT STEPS

The Department will provide updates on this topic as requested.