

Washoe County Community Forestry Program – DRAFT proposal

Project Summary (150 words)

(Include scope, location, partners, and brief summary of expected outcomes. Identify the alignment with disadvantaged communities).

This Program Development and Tree Canopy Management grant will allow Washoe County to launch a Community Forestry Program by hiring a Community Forester, who will complete the following:

- Update and expand the GIS inventory of trees in Washoe County, then develop future planting plans targeting Disadvantaged Communities and monitoring and assessment protocols.
- With partners, oversee the development of a Community Forest Management Plan to guide the management of County trees in our forest parks, along the Truckee River, and throughout our communities.
- Participate with partners (Reno, Sparks, Reno-Sparks Indian Colony, Washoe County School District, Truckee Meadows Parks Foundation), other stakeholders and citizens to plant +/- 4,800 trees in EPA Disadvantaged Communities.
- Coordinate with regional partners and stakeholders to develop a Community Forest Program with planting, public education and management strategies to ensure the long-term health of all trees and forests in Washoe County.

Statement of Need (500 words)

(Identify the environmental and human needs that the proposed project/program will address. Include information about why these disadvantaged communities are targeted for your programs and projects (i.e., equity needs, environmental impacts or barriers, etc.) and identify alignment with the Justice 40 initiative. Address existing plans, documents, programs or other existing identification of the need.)

Home to the nation’s fastest-warming city (Reno), with wildfire risk in our western forests, air quality that fails EPA standards for ozone and particulates, numerous Disadvantaged Communities experiencing extreme heat and air pollution, and no up-to-date forest inventories, canopy-expansion or management plans in place, Washoe County has an intense need for a Community Forestry Program.

Reno initiated the Truckee Meadows’ commitment to an urban tree canopy by earning a Tree City USA designation in 1982, and by launching the ReLeaf Program, which commits to expanding Reno’s urban tree canopy from its current 5.2% to 15%.

In the past, Washoe County, Reno, and Sparks had more robust tree management capacities, including a GIS-based inventory of Washoe County trees in regional parks and along the Truckee River. But regional parks departments were decimated by the economic downturn starting in 2008 and have never fully recovered. Washoe County’s GIS inventory has languished and not been updated in more than a decade.

The tree canopy in the Truckee Meadows is inadequate and skews by race and economic status – the healthiest parts of the canopy are in the whiter, wealthier neighborhoods, while the most extreme heat and air pollution have been documented in the poorer neighborhoods and communities of color with too few or no trees. These inequities result in higher asthma, cardiovascular disease and other heat- and pollution-related ailments at much higher rates in these communities. These inequities have been documented by Reno’s urban tree canopy inventory, by a 2018 heat-island mapping project by Arizona State University in partnership with Washoe County Health Department, and by a Physicians, Scientists and Engineers’ 2021 GIS analysis and publication, “Equity Focused Climate Strategies for Nevada.”

The Truckee Meadows Community Forestry Coalition, comprising two local, non-profit organizations (Keep Truckee Meadows Beautiful and the Reno Gleaning Project) and several national nonprofit foundations and organizations, has a website that provides information to citizens and businesses about tree-care best practices. However, its influence in the community is minimal and insufficient.

To date, Washoe County has not had the capacity to engage in regional tree-planting and forest-management efforts. However, the growing intensity of the climate crisis, intensifying urban heat, increasing risk of wildfire, and our growing urban population make this need ever-more pressing. As the umbrella jurisdiction for all communities in the Truckee Meadows, Washoe County is excellently suited to serve as the convener of cross-jurisdictional, community-wide efforts to build a consensus-based Program that addresses these inequities in a strategic, coordinated manner that brings trees, health, prosperity, community resilience and justice to our Disadvantaged Communities and the entire community. And federal Justice 40 priorities give us the opportunity to bring justice to these frontline communities.

Note: the federal government has since discontinued EPA recognition of Disadvantaged Communities (DACs) and Justice 40 priorities. However, Washoe County has a strategic priority to serve vulnerable populations, which in many cases are people living in parts of Washoe County facing extreme heat and air pollution. Historic EPA mapping data that identified DACs is one good place to start our analysis.

Outcomes Expected (250 words)

(Quantified outcomes, deliverables, and beneficiaries of the project. Ensure connection between outcomes and identified need for program and how they target issues identified as defining a community as disadvantaged).

In partnership with regional stakeholders and community members, Washoe County's Community Forestry Program will achieve the following outcomes:

- Hire a permanent Community Forester to oversee the Program (3 years of 1 FTE or a contracted equivalent).
- Coordinate the planting of +/- 4,800 trees in Disadvantaged Communities as identified by the EPA's EJ Screen mapping tool (now discontinued by the federal government).
 - This number to be confirmed and updated during program-design phase with the community.
- With partners and stakeholders, create a Community Forest Program, which will consist of the following:
 - Membership and commitments by community partners and stakeholders,
 - A shared vision, process and goals to achieve Washoe County's share of Nevada's 10-year 100,000 Tree Plan.
 - A Community Forest Management Plan to guide partners and the public toward best practices to manage the County's trees in our forest parks, along the Truckee River, and throughout our communities.
 - Public education curricula and community engagement strategies to tree-planting and long-term care best practices – targeting Disadvantaged Communities, businesses and the wider public.
 - An updated, expanded and shared GIS-based inventory of Washoe County's trees along the Truckee River and throughout our communities to guide future planting and management.
 - Infrastructure, policy, budgetary and coordination commitments to maximize long-term success for all trees in targeted DACs and elsewhere in the County.

As a result, Washoe County's Community Forestry Program will reduce urban heat and improve air quality, mental and physical health, soil health, stormwater management, quality of life, property values, regional economy, and stronger community resilience – all directly benefitting DACs and the wider public.

Project Alignment with State and National Goals (500 words)

(Identify the issues the project addresses with respect to the 10-year urban forest plan and goals of NDF's Urban and Community Forestry program. Identify alignment with Justice 40 initiative)

The proposed Community Forestry Program aligns with Washoe County’s mission statement “Working together regionally to provide and sustain a safe, secure and healthy community” and is directly related to the Washoe County Board of County Commissioner’s strategic priority to serve Vulnerable Populations: “Identify and triage the most vulnerable populations as identified by community need and work together cross-departmentally and regionally to provide adequate resources and support.”

Washoe County's Community Forestry Program aligns with the national 10-year Urban Forest Plan in the following ways:

1. Integrate Urban and Community Forestry Into all Scales of Planning by bringing regional jurisdictions, agencies, organizations and community members together to create shared goals, processes and metrics to create a living Washoe County Community Forest Plan.
2. Promote the Role of Urban and Community Forestry in Human Health and Wellness by promoting these benefits in our shared community education and outreach materials, and by aligning jurisdictional planning language and goals similarly.
3. Cultivate Diversity, Equity, and Leadership Within the Urban Forestry Community by targeting disadvantaged communities and organizations engaging with them to recruit leaders and develop a workforce in these communities to ensure success of the Program.
4. Strengthen Urban and Community Forest Health and Biodiversity for Long-Term Resilience by orienting planting, planning and management goals around the understanding of our community and community forests as part of a complex and dynamic ecological community.
5. Improve Urban and Community Forest Management, Maintenance, and Stewardship by uniting tree and forest management agencies, jurisdictions, and community organizations around shared inventory data, management goals and practices.
6. Diversify, Leverage, and Increase Funding for Urban and Community Forestry by building the Washoe County Community Forestry Program needs and success into the planning and budgeting conversations among all jurisdictions and agencies.
7. Increase Public Awareness and Environmental Education to Promote Stewardship by including Disadvantaged Community members and community organizations in the development and implementation of community education curricula, outreach, and project planning.

The Community Forestry Program will meet NDF's Urban and Community Forestry Goal by convening partners, stakeholders and management tools around the shared goals to grow and manage Washoe County's disparate forests and trees on all public and private properties as a single but diverse ecosystem that is managed for shared social, environmental, and economic benefits.

The Community Forestry Program will surpass Justice 40 goals by planting all new trees in EPA-identified Disadvantaged Communities, and by creating a Forestry Plan that will maximize all Washoe County forests and trees for the long-term benefits of Disadvantaged Communities and the entire community.

Implementation strategy and methodology (1500 words)

(Provide a detailed explanation of the proposed approach, methodology, and strategies. Include measurable goals and expected outcomes/accomplishments. Include methods for project evaluation techniques to evaluate outcomes and assess the resiliency of the program proposed. Discuss the programs or processes that will allow for sustainability and impact beyond the life of the grant.)

Washoe County plans to address intensifying urban heat and poor air quality in our Disadvantaged Communities by developing a Community Forestry Program that strengthens community vision, capacities and commitment to nurture an expanded, vibrant community forest. Community conversations began with the launching of Reno's ReLeaf program, but Washoe County has had neither staff nor capacity to enter and build on these conversations, until now.

A Program Development and Tree Canopy Management grant will provide Washoe County with the capacity to convene community partners and stakeholders around shared goals, knowledge, tools, and commitment to achieve these goals. Once awarded, we will move forward with the following implementation strategy and methodologies:

Convene the community

Various jurisdictions, agencies, organizations and community members in Washoe County have expressed the need to expand the scope of our community forests and improve their health for the long term. However, these conversations have never taken place in an organized way to agree on regional priorities and capacities necessary make this happen. Washoe County will begin by convening the Washoe County Community Forestry Advisory Committee (Washoe County Staff and Reno Forester) to design initial steps toward building a larger process and program.

The next phase is to convene project partners (Reno, Sparks, Washoe County School District, Reno Sparks Indian Colony, Truckee Meadows Parks Foundation) to refine initial goals and next steps involving GIS inventories, analysis and capacity requirements for a 1- to 3-year planting plan, as well as process for building the larger Community Forestry Program.

Because the County's forests in Davis, Galena, and Bowers Mansion parks are qualitatively different than "urban" forests, a separate process will be necessary among Washoe County Parks, Nevada Division of Forestry, Truckee Meadows Fire and the US Forest Service to discuss needs and next steps toward developing a Community Forest Management Plan to address these specific areas.

With these initial conversations underway, we can invite additional community stakeholders and potential partners to join the conversation, including members of the Truckee Meadows Community Forestry Coalition, Soulful Seeds, Urban Roots (and other community garden and food organizations), the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe, the Nevada Environmental Justice Coalition, NAACP, Keep Truckee Meadows Beautiful, relevant Reno and Sparks Neighborhood Advisory Boards and Washoe County Citizen Advisory Boards (NABs and CABs), University of Nevada, Reno, Desert Research Institute and others to gain from their knowledge and insights. These conversations will inform planting plans, public education and community engagement needs, monitoring tools and methods, work force development, equity, inclusion, justice, and long-term management needs to build a robust Community Forestry Program.

This presents an opportunity to expand the Washoe County Community Forestry Advisory Committee to formalize these community-wide conversations, learn from and incorporate our community's collective genius, and gain their collective commitment to the development of a Community Forestry Program.

Develop tools

A successful Community Forestry Program will succeed only if informed by quality data. Washoe County's GIS tree inventory has not been updated since 2011. An important early piece of the Program will be to hire (in partnership with Reno and Truckee Meadows Parks Foundation) two AmeriCorps members to update the inventory. The Washoe County GIS Department will combine these data with our EarthDefine high-resolution tree canopy data to understand the scope and health of our current forests and trees.

Next, we will complete a GIS gap analysis and combine this with partner and stakeholder needs and capacities, to identify where trees need to be planted in the next 1 to 3 years, while the broader Community Forestry Program is in development. Once the Program is developed, these mapping and monitoring tools will help guide community actions over the next decade and beyond.

Software discussions will include criteria and protocols for tree health assessment and future monitoring, a shared software system that all partners can use to manage their parts of the Program, including project planning, and volunteer recruitment and management. We don't expect all this to be managed by a single software suite, but integrated and coordinated data management is important to the success of the Program.

As part of this process, analysis will be necessary to nurture the ecological health and biological diversity of our growing community forest. This may take place using software, and it will need to be a regular agenda item in our collective analyses of the Program.

Build a shared vision, goals, process and metrics

A Community Forestry Program is important because its development engages partners, stakeholders, and community members in building a shared vision for what we want our community to be like in 10, 20 or 50 years. What do we want? How do we define it? How will we get there? What tools, capacities and funding do we need? What capacities do various parties bring to the equation? What metrics will we use to measure and evaluate our progress? How can we build the culture and administrative infrastructure to achieve these goals?

Educate and engage the community

The success of a Community Forestry Program depends on everyone understanding why trees are important and how we can all work together to bring their benefits to Disadvantaged Communities and the general public. Once the core concepts and pieces of the Program are developed, partners will develop best-practice educational and engagement materials to share them with the broader community. Education and training will be necessary to bring all participating organizations and people together around best practices for tree planting and long-term care. Additionally, we need to develop (or gather – a lot of best practices and knowledge already exist in programs and communities elsewhere) messages and curricula to help our broader community understand why trees are important and how we need to work together to nurture a healthy, vibrant community forest. These materials will include information to help private property owners maximize tree health on their own properties.

Delegation, support, and accountability

Expanding and nurturing our community forests will require collective coordination and capacity development; no single organization possesses what it takes to bring this vision to fruition. Every participating organization, jurisdiction and agency has an important skill and strength to bring to the equation. Long-term sustainability of the Program beyond the life of this grant will require distributed commitment and resources across diverse jurisdictions and organizations and throughout the community.

Share, iterate and adapt

The Community Forestry Program will be a living process, not a binder on a shelf. We will need to iterate and evolve as we learn, leverage opportunities, respond to challenges, and incorporate best practices. Expanding and nurturing our community forests will require coordination and capacity that no one organization possesses. However, as a community we have the shared desire and intelligence to grow and care for a healthy and vibrant community forest. The development of the Community Forestry Plan will be a community conversation that harnesses the wisdom and intelligence of all community members, especially Indigenous Tribes and directly impacted Disadvantaged Communities. This grant will help Washoe County to continue the process Reno started with the ReLeaf program, leveraging the processes, partners and stakeholders to build a successful Community Forestry Program to achieve desired outcomes.

Timeline (500 words)

(provide schedule with timeline for activities and milestones for deliverable activities).

With support from a Program Development and Tree Canopy Management grant, Washoe County will launch a Community Forestry Program to mitigate our region's urban heat and air pollution impacts on EPA-identified Disadvantaged Communities. Our work will pursue this timeline after the grant award, being iterative and adaptable to changing dynamics and factors:

Within 30 days

- Finalize Community Forester position description and post job.
- Convene Washoe County Community Forestry Advisory Committee (Washoe County staff and Reno Urban Forester Matt Basile).
- With Reno, confirm and collate past and current GIS tree inventories.
- Reach out to partners and other stakeholders to expand conversations toward strategies and metrics to build the community-wide Program.

Within 120 days

- Hire Community Forester (assuming quality candidates)
- Hold tree-planting events for Earth Day/Arbor Day, targeting DACs.

Within 60 days of CF hire

- Perform GIS assessment of tree canopies within County DACs and initial estimate of planting priorities; share with partner jurisdictions and stakeholders.
 - This work has largely been completed by Washoe County's GIS department in partnership with our Sustainability division.
- With community stakeholders, develop planting goals, capacity and infrastructure needs assessments, and partnership process (possibly expanding Community Forestry Advisory Committee).
- Convene management partners (Reno, USFS, NDF, TMFPD) to discuss tree and forest management needs.
- Finalize and share RFP to hire consultant to complete Washoe County Community Forest Management Plan.

Within 90 days of CF hire

- Secure contractor to develop Community Forest Management Plan.
- Confirm GIS-based target plantings and first-year planting schedule with partners, jurisdictions and stakeholders. Finalize process to identify longer-term planting needs (locations, infrastructure, budget and logistics).
- Convene community partners and stakeholders to develop community outreach and education materials to maximize planting success and long-term viability of plantings.
- Identify additional funding sources and strategies to ensure long-term viability of the Community Forestry Program.

Within 6 months of CF hire

- With community and management partners, identify software capacities needed to manage forests, trees, plantings, partners and volunteers to ensure strategic tree planting success and long-term forest and tree management best practices.
- Work with jurisdictional and agency facilities, engineering, and regional partners to determine municipal irrigation and construction cost estimates.
- Draft a budget for estimated short- and long-term costs.
- With Reno and TMPF, secure 2 AmeriCorps members for 11 months to update regional GIS tree inventory (timing depends on seasons and cycle of AmeriCorps recruitment).

Within 1 year of CF hire

- Finalize Community Forest Management Plan and Community Forestry Program to cover planting calendar, placement, community outreach and education, and infrastructure and funding needs to achieve Washoe County's share of Nevada's 10-year 100,000 Tree Plan.
- Finalize GIS tree inventory (depending on timing of AmeriCorps project above)
- Secure Washoe County budget for annual staff and equipment needs

Ongoing

- Revisit GIS analysis, planting plans, Forest Management Plan and Community Forestry Program semi-annually and as needed with partners and stakeholder to align with goals.

Organizational Background (500 words)

(describe experience, capacity w/ names/positions/job titles, work skill of staff. Certified arborists or industry professionals assisting with the project).

Washoe County has a population of 490,000+ across 6,542 square miles. The County is governed by a Board of County Commissioners and supports innovative, efficient, and transparent practices that serve the citizens of the County. The County partners with leaders, citizens, community organizations, stakeholders, and decision makers to advance initiatives that align with our strategic objectives.

Key personnel for the Washoe County Community Forester initiative will include Brian Beffort, who will inform the County's strategic direction and wider community engagement; and Stephanie D'Arcy, who will oversee the activities of the Community Forester. Daily program activities will be completed by the (proposed) Community Forester position. Washoe County is fortunate to have strong financial management system and internal controls that are audited annually by an external auditor. The initiative's financial components will be overseen by the Office of County Manager's fiscal compliance officer, Alfredo Villa.

- **Park Operations Superintendent**, Stephanie D'Arcy. Stephanie has 25 years of experience managing parks, facilities, operations, volunteers, museums, programs and departments in Reno and Sparks. Stephanie will provide direction on parks-specific tasks such as truthing the existing tree inventory and creating Forest Management Plan for Washoe County's forested parks.
- **Sustainability Manager**, Brian Beffort. With a master's degree in Sustainability and Environmental Management from Harvard University and more than two decades of experience in Nevada natural resource advocacy, stewardship, policy and community engagement, Brian will provide strategic guidance to the Community Forestry Program and coordination with regional stakeholders and partners.
- **Fiscal Compliance Officer**, Alfredo Villa, works in the County Manager's Office and has more than 4 years' experience with Financial Statement and Single Audits, tracking of Actual vs. Budgeted costs, incorporating projected final costs and goals, building budgets and working with fellow staff and partners to accomplish implementation goals. He will ensure compliance with all local, state, and federal regulations and program guidance.
- **Community Forester**, to-be-hired. The Community Forester position will be filled through a competitive process. The individual selected will possess a minimum of a bachelor's degree, from an accredited college or university in Parks Management, Recreation Management, Natural Resource Management, Forestry/Resource Management or similar, and possess the knowledge and experience to carry out required activities associated with this proposal.

Project Partners (500 words)

(identify partners, and their role in project).

- City of Reno (a Tree City, USA member), Matt Basile, Urban Forester. Prior to joining the City of Reno in 2017, Mr. Basile held positions as the City Arborist for the City of Evanston Illinois, Village Forester

for the Village of Oak Lawn Illinois, and urban forestry consultant with Natural Path Urban Forestry Consultants. His experience includes leading crews performing tree care and maintenance, tree inventory management, tree preservation, arboriculture training, volunteer group leading, urban plan review, and development of details and specifications for new trees being added to landscapes. Matt is the Staff Liaison for the City of Reno Urban Forestry Commission. Mr. Basile has presented on soil and tree health, tree preservation during construction, teaches arborist test prep classes, and has presented on many other subjects at conferences. Matt will serve on Washoe County's Community Forestry Advisory Committee and inform the creation of Community Forest Management Plan and Community Forestry Program.

- City of Sparks, John Martini, Assistant City Manager. John Martini started his career with the City of Sparks in 1999 as a Civil Engineer in the newly created Community Development Department. He has served various roles in the City, with an emphasis on Community Development and the Engineering, Planning and Building Divisions. In 2019, John was selected by the City Manager to serve as the Assistant City Manager. John's management duties as Assistant City Manager include oversight and direction of the Community Services and Parks and Recreation Departments. He will serve as the primary point of contact in coordinating Sparks' involvement in expanding the City's tree canopy.
- Reno-Sparks Indian Colony, Candace Stowell, Planning Director. Candace will serve as the primary point of contact for RSIC and initial convener of conversations with the RSIC Tribal Council and members. She will ensure the Community Forestry Plan supports sustainable growth and development on the Reno-Sparks Indian Colony, while advancing and protecting traditional values, the environment, cultural resources, and the best outcomes for future generations.

Budget information available upon request