



Inner Forests

We need **more trees in our cities**

The inner forest of a city can take on many shapes and sizes: an abandoned and overgrown lot, an avenue with towering street trees, a vast inner-city park or a repurposed parking space that now serves as a green ‘pocket park’. Inner forests can be wild and natural, manicured, or somewhere in between and they are found on public and private land. They provide leisure and recreation opportunities, stabilize slopes and riverbanks, and intercept rainfall reducing the damaging effect of stormwater . Each of these forms add to the mosaic of a city’s urban forest.

Unfortunately, these varying types of inner forests often miss reaching full potential. They are often fragmented, degraded and shrinking. And because the urban environment is incredibly dynamic, urban trees experience difficult circumstances that compromise their growth and survival. Extreme heat, poor soil quality, drought, flooding and limited space to grow above and below ground challenge their survival and increase their vulnerability to disease and insect infestation. City budgets are often insufficient to effectively manage trees and it is not always clear who holds responsibility for maintenance. Residents are not always aware of the benefits trees provide and often see trees as nuisances, expensive to maintain, dangerous and damaging to private and public property.

Urban forests are often overlooked or under prioritized in development decisions and city budget allocations. But given the myriad benefits they provide, cities should utilize inner forests as part of their broader strategies to build resilience to climate change, promote low carbon development and advance city-wide sustainability efforts.

Benefits

The good news is that cities around the world are recognizing the benefits of trees and nature in urban areas. They are taking actions to protect and expand their inner forests, to improve quality of life for their residents, provide cost-effective services and mitigate and adapt to environmental challenges. Urban forests can regulate temperatures in the summer, keeping cities cooler and residents more comfortable while reducing energy usage associated with cooling. Inner forests support the hydrologic cycle, slowing and capturing stormwater and allowing rain to evaporate or percolate back into soils. This process replenishes water tables, reduces the quantity of stormwater in drainage systems and mitigates local flooding. The roots of inner forests stabilize soil and can prevent erosion and more serious events such as landslides.

Inner forests can improve quality of life for the residents of a city. They have been linked to improvements in physical and mental health, including increased physical activity, reduced stress, and lower blood pressure. Improved air quality is attributed to reducing incidences of asthma, stroke, and heart disease. Furthermore, urban



forests can bring a community together, strengthening ties and building social cohesion. Inner forests can provide food and habitat for local wildlife, preserving and increasing biodiversity within a city. Inner forests can also impact the local economy by increasing property values and even creating jobs in the care and management of urban trees.

Even the most well-intentioned cities face challenges conserving, managing or expanding their inner forests effectively, efficiently, and equally. Disparities in access to green space exist in most cities, often leaving marginalized communities without the social, economic, and environmental benefits provided by nature.

What Cities4Forests Offers

Cities4Forests is supporting its network of cities to better manage, protect and grow their urban forests.

- 1. Technical support & capacity development:** Cities4Forests builds capacity of local city actors through webinars, presentations, trainings, consultations and in-depth technical support with experts and other organizations. Opportunities exist to work locally and internationally on a range of topics including planning and policy, finance, and stakeholder engagement.
- 2. Evidence-based research, resources & best-practice guidance:** Cities4Forests provides cutting-edge research, customized tools and best practice guidance documents to support cities in their efforts to manage, protect, and grow their inner forests more effectively. Set to launch in late 2020, our flagship publication – **BETTER FORESTS, BETTER CITIES** – will synthesize current discourse on benefits provided by forests to cities and their residents, focusing on linkages between city-level initiatives and forests at the inner, nearby and faraway scales.
- 3. Peer-to-peer learning & workshops:** Cities4Forests extends a growing network of cities, organizations and technical experts that function as an interconnected support network and provide information and resources to its members. Cities have access to one another through working groups, facilitated conversations, high-level exchanges, and thematic workshops where members share experiences, lessons learned, and other insights. Cities4Forests also provides a limited number of workshops to select cities to facilitate planning and strategy across forest levels.
- 4. Resident engagement & communication campaigns:** Support from residents and local businesses within cities is paramount in creating enabling conditions to establish and expand urban forests on public and private property. Cities4Forests works with cities to build resident awareness and engagement campaigns to connect residents with the forests in their cities.

Contact Information

For more details on what Cities4Forests offers, visit cities4forests.com/forests/inner
Contact our inner forests lead: **Terra Virsilas** | terra.virsilas@wri.org

 Inner Forests

