

SUFC Policy Principles

SUFC members believe vibrant, vital communities grow from healthy natural systems. To promote livable communities, we create, conserve and sustain urban forests resources, trees, and green spaces where people live.

We affirm the following principles as a guide to our joint and collective policy, public education and outreach efforts.

- A. Provide multiple benefits for the public, wherever they live.** A vast body of evidence affirms that urban forests, trees and green space provide multiple benefits to every neighborhood – social and economic, as well as environmental. Urban forests specifically:
- Promote children’s and family health and well-being
 - Sequester carbon
 - Conserve energy
 - Help manage stormwater and run-off, and assure clean water
 - Improve air quality
 - Boost the economic health of communities by increasing property values, and improving business settings
 - Foster neighborhood cohesion and solidarity, reduce crime and create safe spaces for neighbors to interact
 - Make streets safer and communities more walkable
 - Promote and nurture biodiversity in both man-made and natural ecosystems
- B. Address issues at the landscape level.** No ecological boundaries separate urban, community and rural forests. Pests, disease and invasives can spread easily from city to suburb to village to open forests. Likewise, rural and urban forests play vital, indivisible roles in delivering clean water to all communities; they provide fiscally-sound green solutions to stormwater management. Forests systems are interconnected; public policy makers must better understand these connections. SUFC seeks to make the links between urban and community forests (UF) and green infrastructure explicit, and to build this more expansive [and comprehensive] definition into public policies.
- C. Advance science and associated development of best practices for professionals, communities and private citizens.** Research supported or undertaken by the US Forest Service over recent decades provides a strong foundation for understanding the value of urban and community trees to the public. This valuable work can be augmented through increased funding, in addition to research by other public agencies, research institutions and private organizations. At the same time, SUFC members recognize that even the best

science is hard to apply unless it is delivered in ways that different stakeholders will find useful, and *will* use.

- D. Support local initiatives.** SUFC members support policies that build local capacity and maximize the ability of local communities to create quality and sustainable environments. Local action assures maximum leverage for public funds, delivers significant social benefits, engages the public, and contributes to community growth and development. SUFC members support policies that assist local governments and local partners in developing the capacity for long-term management of their urban forests, trees, and green space.
- E. Coordinate State and Federal programs.** For two decades, the US Forest Service and state forestry agencies and their key cooperators provided – and continue to provide – fundamental research, critical resources, and a delivery system in support of the urban and community forestry movement.

Today many federal, state and local agencies have adapted this “green infrastructure” approach to their own particular missions. Coordination among long-standing and new programs can:

- reduce the potential for overlap and duplication;
- multiply the impact of federal investments;
- simplify planning and project implementation for local governments and community partners; and
- build on the successes and synergies of a successful program and delivery system.

SUFC supports collaborative engagement of all relevant community partners and federal and state agencies to create a network that effectively sustains healthy natural and man-made ecosystems and communities. To assure maximum effectiveness, SUFC recommends that federal legislation and programs recognize the need for coordinated delivery systems at the federal, state, tribal and local level.

- F. Plan across boundaries (all-lands approach).** Green infrastructure plans must follow ecological – not agency, state or municipal boundaries. Because communities must account for diverse priorities – from stormwater management to outdoor play spaces or transportation – policymakers should seek ways to foster consideration of ecosystem impacts in the broadest possible context. Opportunities might include:
- Federal programs addressing forest health and ecosystem services should be grounded in an “all lands” approach.
 - Favoring projects which consider the full suite of critical forest priority plans– from newly-developed State Forest Resource Assessments and Strategies [which include urban settings] to state wildlife action plans, invasive pests plans and water quality plans.

- Encouraging projects that deliver benefits at the landscape level, across multiple jurisdictions; and
- Building cross-agency check-offs at the federal and/or state level into rules for major infrastructure projects.

G. Consider process, not just projects. Like any capital investment, green infrastructure projects don't end when build-out is complete. They require subsequent monitoring, maintenance and care. Agencies and organizations that perform these services should be involved in early project planning to assure that ongoing maintenance needs are anticipated. Policymakers should provide adequate funding for maintenance over the expected life cycle of the project to ensure sustainable benefits.

SUFC Operating Principles

General

- A. Members acknowledge that consensus among a broad cross-section of organizations will promote a more positive policy climate for green infrastructure/urban and community forestry. Joint action can deliver better results for all of us rather than independent, uncoordinated advocacy by each of us.
- B. We will strive to be bold, creative and assertive – but patient too, mindful that successful coalitions build over time, as members develop trust and habits of cooperation.
- C. The coalition will be open and inclusive. We will reach out to stakeholders whose views, by reason of economic or social circumstance, are not typically represented on these issues.
- D. We value multiple perspectives and recognize that, while we agree on fundamental principles, members may hold different views on specific issues.
- E. Our positions will be based on sound science and subject to technical review. We will make explicit the connection between our positions and urgent national priorities, e.g. job creation. Our message will be positive, cast in terms that engage diverse audiences.
- F. Change can be driven in many settings, not just through law and policy. Where appropriate, we will seek to achieve our goals through professional education and training as well as market mechanisms – including standards for professional practice, certification systems, as well as building and engineering codes and specifications.
- G. Coalitions survive because members commit themselves to an exercise in collaborative learning – about the issues, and about each other. As circumstances evolve, coalitions must adapt to meet them.

Structure

- A. The group will be led by the SUFC Steering Committee, consisting of any willing member of SUFC. The Steering Committee will be responsible for planning and coordinating activities of the SUFC.
- B. Each SUFC member organization is encouraged to identify a designated representative, with alternates or additional representatives welcome as needed. All members must provide formal acknowledgement of the principles of collaboration, affirming that their

organization endorses participation. Coalition members commit to meeting such times as may be necessary to continue to expand the coalition's policy platform or other timely issues.

- C. The SUFC will identify a Policy Committee that is responsible for advancing legislative and administrative proposals that are consistent with the SUFC policy principles and positions. The Policy Committee will advance recommendations to the full SUFC for endorsement.
- D. Participation in this effort does not necessarily imply agreement with specific policy proposals that might flow from the Coalition – only a willingness to participate formally in the discussion. Members may withdraw from the effort at any time.
- E. The actions and deliberations of the group, including the Steering Committee, will be transparent to all members.
- F. Public communications by SUFC will be subject to review and approval by all Coalition members. Members commit to expedited review of any such communications. Only those positions supported by at least three-quarters of recognized non-abstaining members will be publicly endorsed by the SUFC (including use of SUFC logo.)*.
- G. The group will strive to operate by full consensus of the members whenever taking a public position.
 - When a position has very strong support but falls short of endorsement by full consensus, the group may consider publicly endorsing that position on an “opt-in” basis provided that no more than one-quarter of recognized members oppose that position. ***Documents relating to any position adopted by “opt-in” will clearly list only those members endorsing the position.**
 - When necessary, the group may use facilitated consensus dialogues to develop consensus recommendations.