

South Florida Urban Tree Canopy Coalition
Tree Summit
July 30, 2009
Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden
10901 Old Cutler Road
Coral Gables, FL 33156
Thursday, July 30th 2009
8:30 a.m. to Noon

Summary

South Florida's reputation as a lush, tropical paradise is earned largely by our warm climate making it perfect for most plants to grow here and enjoyed by both residents and visitors alike. However, the tropical trees and colorful landscape that creates our paradise must also contend with hurricanes, diminishing green space due to urban sprawl, citrus canker eradication programs, disease, and harsh environmental conditions. Last time we measured canopy coverage we had areas with coverage as low as 1-2% with the nationwide average at 33%. Furthermore, economic conditions and shrinking budgets have made it even more difficult to maintain urban forests and the public landscape.

The purpose of this meeting is to collectively identify and promote livable, resilient communities in South Florida and to team up in this effort to attract funding for programs for increasing tree canopy, the development of urban forestry programs, and connecting park-like public spaces.

This Summit will also explore the interest in forming a regional coalition "South Florida Urban Tree Canopy Coalition" to collaborate on pertinent issues related to the restoration and expansion of our urban forests.

Presentations and discussions will address the need to develop new funding strategies and public policies to promote the creation of livable, forested, attractive, and healthy communities throughout South Florida.

Adequate tree canopy is vital to the environmental and economic well being of our community.

- ✓ Trees save money on our electric bills by shading homes, offices, and streets, resulting in a reduced need for the use of air conditioning.
- ✓ Trees reduce stormwater runoff by intercepting rainfall and actively removing water from the soil.
- ✓ Trees increase property values and make communities more visually and environmentally appealing.
- ✓ Trees improve air quality by absorbing pollutants and particulate matter from the air.
- ✓ Trees shade pavement and reduce air temperatures and the urban heat island.
- ✓ Trees reduce CO² levels and their impact on global climate change.
- ✓ There is also a positive correlation between trees and social benefits and quality of life indicators, including the reduction of reports of physical violence in public housing that had trees outside the buildings and significantly better relations and stronger ties between neighbors.
- ✓ Research also shows that consumers are willing to shop longer and spend more in retail areas that have trees because trees provide a "human habitat."

With all the known benefits of trees, why is our urban tree canopy in critical condition? There's no a simple answer. A healthy urban forest has many challenges.

We need active attention, new policy, and funding to reverse the decline.

Participation in the Tree Summit is a step forward that we can come together across jurisdictions and take action to reverse the degradation of our tree canopy. Bring your ideas from your cities and organizations. We are tackling the tough goal of 30% tree canopy coverage by the year 2020. Working together we can reverse the loss of our urban tree canopy. Success brings us a more livable community and enhances our quality of life.