

STATE OF THE URBAN FOREST IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA



A message from the Green Infrastructure Ontario Coalition

This report is the first of its kind. It reports baseline data on the health of the urban forest across the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). It is a collaborative effort of 17 municipal and regional partners, bound together by a shared goal to preserve and enhance our urban forest – all of the trees and shrubs that grow in our parks, in ravines and natural areas, in front yards and back yards and along our commercial and residential streets.

Key Findings

The urban forest is vital green infrastructure

- Currently there is a great focus on investing in grey infrastructure – roads, buildings, sewer pipes, etc.
- Living green infrastructure, such as urban forests, provides countless benefits that cannot be replaced by grey infrastructure. It is a system that includes all natural vegetative systems and green technologies such as green roofs, parks, gardens, wetlands, urban farms, bioswales, and porous pavements.
- Municipalities recognize and are now measuring their green infrastructure assets and the multitude of benefits they provide. For example, the GTA urban forest:
 - **improves air quality (\$36.5 million annually)**
 - **sequesters carbon (value of carbon currently stored is \$70 million)**
 - **saves energy through shade and cooling (\$20 million annually)**
- Urban forests are key in helping communities adapt to climate change by mitigating stormwater runoff and reducing the urban heat island effect.



We face a growing crisis

- Rapid urban development and infill, invasive pests and violent storm events are wreaking havoc on our urban forests.
- Only 4 species make up 54% of the population (Maple, Cedar, Ash, and Buckthorn), leaving the urban forest vulnerable to pest/disease.
- 3.2 million ash trees are expected to die as a result of Emerald Ash Borer (10% of the population).
- More frequent, violent storms have resulted in massive tree loss in many municipalities.
- Municipalities are in “crisis mode” post insect/storm devastation, which quickly eats up limited resources for proactive urban forest management.
- Climate change will only exacerbate the crisis – more invasive pests and more violent weather events.

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Key Findings (cont'd)

Urban forests need support from higher levels of government

- Most municipalities do not have adequate resources to proactively manage their urban forest assets.
- Currently there is no coordination, research, funding or best practice support from higher levels of government – each municipality is left to fend for its own piece of the urban forest.
- Provincial and federal governments must help build the capacity of local and regional governments, non-profit organizations and the private sector to prepare and protect our urban forest.
- Infrastructure investments must include living green infrastructure such as urban forests.



A CALL TO ACTION

Supported by stakeholders across the province, Ontario's Urban Forests: Call to Action identifies four strategic priorities urgently needed to help protect and sustain Ontario's urban forests.

1. Gain multilevel government support and funding
2. Coordinate action at a provincial scale
3. Support municipalities and other stakeholders in managing their urban forests as assets
4. Undertake research and share knowledge and best practices

We urge the province to join us in working with all stakeholders to develop a province wide, multistakeholder urban forest strategy.

For more information visit:

www.greeninfrastructureontario.org

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