



[Comments](#) 5 | [Recommend](#) ↕ 0

Dallas committee studying how trees grow money

07:12 AM CST on Tuesday, November 18, 2008

By DAN X. McGRAW / The Dallas Morning News
dmcgraw@dallasnews.com

Steve Houser sees dollar signs in trees.

He and other members of the Dallas Urban Forest Advisory Committee have launched a pilot program aimed at identifying and counting trees to evaluate their financial and environmental value to the city.

The pilot relies on LIDAR – Light Detection and Ranging – which is similar to radar, and a high-resolution camera attached to a specialized plane to capture data near Turtle Creek and at Reverchon Park. Neither technology has been used in surveying trees before, Mr. Houser said.

"It is an inherent gamble," he said. "We can't manage the urban forest if we don't know how big it is. We have been asked to manage this asset, but we don't know how much we have. We need this data."

Several other cities, including Plano, Colleyville and Houston, have counted trees manually during the past decade.

Officials want to know how many trees they've got to figure out how they contribute to the city. Trees can increase property values and cut electric bills by providing shade during hot months. Trees can also reduce pollution, help with flood control and improve air quality.

The advisory committee hopes the data can be used to map the location, species, height and overall number of trees. The results could help officials care for existing trees and determine where to plant new ones.

"When people look around, they just see a nice tree with shade," said John Giedraitis, urban forestry program coordinator for Texas Forest Service. "They don't think of the social, economic and environmental effects of that tree. Trees have a lot of benefits."

University of Texas at Dallas professor Fang Qiu has already started analyzing data from the pilot program in hopes of getting an accurate count.

"This is possible," he said. "We feel pretty confident we can do this."

By the time it's done, the pilot will cost about \$109,000, Mr. Houser said. None of it will be covered by public funds. The committee still needs to raise \$22,000 to cover expenses.

The pilot should be wrapped up by early next year. If it is successful, officials hope to expand the project across the region.

In 2005, Houston's regional tree survey found more than 660 million trees that add \$205 billion to the area, Mr. Houser said.

"We could easily exceed that," he said. "But we don't have any idea of the value or how to manage it without this study."