

**USDA Forest Service**  
**“Caring for the land and serving people.”**

# **NUCFAC**

**National Urban and Community Forestry Advisory Council**

**COMMUNICATION PLAN**  
LONG-TERM COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY &  
INFORMATIONAL CAMPAIGN

**October 2000**

## **INTRODUCTION**

This Public Affairs plan lays the foundation and sets the goals on which the National Urban and Community Forestry Advisory Council, NUCFAC, will build to advance the interest of urban forests and green infrastructure throughout the nation.

It will address strategic and tactical concerns. Strategic concerns will be addressed in the plan's strategy section; tactical concerns will be addressed in the "Informational" section.

The basic plan will evolve and change to continually meet the immediate and long-term communication needs of NUCFAC. This plan is a guide, and the events and actions contained in it are not permanently fixed. The underlying message, however, of all NUCFAC communication activities remains unaffected by any changes.

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**LONG-TERM COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The communication strategy found herein will be long term. It will be viable over a period of one to five years, being updated on a regular basis. Phase I of the plan will extend from April 26, 2001 through December 31, 2001. Phase II will begin after that. This plan, however, primarily will focus on the Phase I portion of the plan. Phase II is mentioned.

Having a long-term (one to five years) strategy will allow for budget plans, activities, and a schedule of events over an extended period of time, resulting in a better coordination with existing programs and better allocation of limited resources.

## **STRATEGY GOAL**

The goal of this strategy is to motivate urban-dwellers to plant trees in urban communities by increasing awareness of trees' social, environmental, and economic benefits and provide tools for community-based urban forestry programs to do the same.

## **SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS**

### **What is the problem?**

There is a lack of investment, i.e. time and energy in urban forests and green infrastructure, resulting in reduced quality of life and destruction of natural ecosystems. While some people may be irritated by this, individual efforts to limit it by improving green spaces and planting trees in communities are lacking because most people are unaware of trees' full benefits. This plan supposes that this lack of awareness is not reflective of a negative attitude toward trees, but rather is reflective of a lack of knowledge. In fact, research shows that people basically are positive and have a friendly attitude toward trees. However, because people are unaware that the nation's urban forests benefit communities socially, environmentally and economically, there is a lack of sustained effort to plant and maintain them.

Socially, research identifies a potential for trees planted in urban settings to improve public health through reduction of stress by adding to the enjoyment of living and work environments. Research also shows that green infrastructure enhances a sense of community and environmental responsibility.

Environmentally, research shows that there are tremendous natural benefits -- climate control, soil erosion protection, carbon dioxide and oxygen balancing, filtering of pollution, energy conservation, and providing wildlife habitat -- offered by trees. Even though these benefits are relatively well known, repeating them often to keep them in the thoughts of citizens can be useful.

Compounding the problem is a lack of understanding about the economic benefits of community trees and green infrastructure. Citizens do not have reliable information about how trees appreciate property value, reduce heating and cooling costs, and offset environmental and health costs. As a result, in surveys they report only moderate financial benefit from community trees.

The common thread that runs through the three pivot points of this problem is a lack of knowledge and/or understanding about the impacts of urban forests on communities and neighborhoods. Researchers know that healthy ecosystems in urbanized areas benefit the social, environmental and economic impacts on surrounding communities, whereas declining ecosystems in urbanized areas have adverse social, environmental and economic impacts.

If left unchecked, this lack of public knowledge will lead to greater urban sprawl and a further decline in natural ecosystems in and around urbanized areas as evidenced by these statistics:

- Between 1970 and 1990, the suburban population in the United States increased 60 percent, compared to the 12 percent in urban areas.
- Eleven states have statewide land-planning policies that include growth boundaries.
- Every hour in the US about 50 acres of land become part of suburban development.
- Every year 400,000 acres of land in the U.S. are developed.

-- Data from Environmental News Network (ENN), The Energy Report, U.S. News & World Report, and Sierra Club

Changing demographics, increased populations, and urban forest ecosystem complexity are driving the need to better inform and educate American citizens about the benefits and the environmental health challenges of urban forests. If community trees are to continue providing aesthetic enjoyment, producing healthy environments, and contributing to productive local economies, then investment must be made now.

Moreover, The International Society of Arboriculture states that improved communication and education regarding urban forestry is a “national priority.” Based on research gathered from 123 experts in various aspects of urban forestry and 30 organizational representatives whose professional and volunteer activities impact urban ecosystems, ISA contends that lack of information dissemination is a contributing factor in declining urban ecosystems. Their report, A National Research Agenda for Urban Forestry in the 1990’s, states:

As expected, all communication/education items received high rankings from the respondents. Independent of information, dissemination and research needs, the

respondents firmly believe that improved communication and education is a national priority.

In addition, ISA lists the environmental, social and economic benefits of urban trees as important information dissemination need areas. All of this points to the need for this campaign to ensure the transmission of information about urban forestry and community trees.

### **AUDIENCE ANALYSIS**

Because it is desired that people invest time, energy and capital in designing, cultivating and maintaining urban forests, it will be necessary for this strategy to appeal to groups and individuals, that have the ability and the means to accomplish this goal. Target audiences will need some combination of decision-making authority, organizational skills, disposable income, ability to influence others, volunteer-able time, and at least a minimal interest in the environment. Because the campaign is national in scope and urban-dwellers in every demographic group possess some needed element, this plan proposes targeting all private citizens who live in urban areas.

Community-based urban forest organizations that have a built in constituency also can be engaged to encourage citizens to plant trees in communities. In addition, several other important groups can benefit from a national campaign, although these groups are not specifically targeted by the campaign.

### **AUDIENCE/PUBLICS**

A. Urban-dwellers/Private Citizens

B. Existing Community-Based Urban Forestry Organizations

C. Other Important Groups (not specifically targeted):

1. Community Planners (Decision-making authority)
  - Landscape Architects
  - Land Developers
  - City Engineers
  - Homebuilders
2. Environmental Leaders (Interest in the environment/Organizational skills)
  - Public Policy Leaders
  - Opinion Leaders
  - Activists
3. Wash. D.C. Decision Makers
  - Congress
  - Federal Natural Resource Agencies

4. City and State Decision Makers/Opinion Leaders
  - City Officials
  - Mayors and Managers
  - State Foresters
  
5. Community Engineers and Organizations (Decision-making authority)
  - Landscape Architects
  - Home Builders
  - Tree boards
  - Environmental planners

### **STRATEGY OBJECTIVES**

1. That 80 percent of urban forestry programs responding to the campaign share website address with others to generate more knowledge about trees' benefits during Phase I.
  
2. That more than 50 percent of private citizens responding to the campaign through ads become aware by seeking more information about urban trees during Phase I.
  
3. To encourage nationwide local use and dissemination of kick-start campaign materials by 30 percent of community-based urban forestry programs responding during Phase I.
  
4. That more than 25 percent of community-based urban forestry programs responding to the campaign during phase I report increased tree planting and membership.

### **STRATEGY - GENERAL**

Because on a macro scale, the goal of this plan is to create in urban-dwellers one or more new beliefs and/or attitudes that motivate them to plant trees, it will be necessary to rely on persuasive communication.

Research suggests that people have a favorable opinion of trees. Therefore, this plan will use the following communication techniques that have been shown to be particularly effective in persuading friendly audiences:

- Use strong, overt emotional appeals.

- Provide an underpinning of reasonable arguments to increase the chances that the presentation will have long-term effects.
- Stress trustworthiness.
- Once the audience's conviction is adequately strengthened make direct, concrete appeals for action.

## **STRATEGY - COGNITIVE CONSISTENCY**

More specifically, in order to break through the mind-numbing amount of persuasive appeals in today's marketplace, this plan proposes the use of the "cognitive consistency theory" of persuasion.

According to the theory, motivation for behavior occurs when different internal thoughts conflict and create tension. The tension between two pieces of information creates the motivation for people to change behaviors and act consistently with their beliefs, values, and perceptions to ease the tension and bring themselves back to a peaceful state.

What is innovative about this approach is its desire to create internal disagreement in viewers and readers, thereby motivating them to act in the interest of urban forests. This strategy does not rely on traditional informational structures, which only seek to increase target audience awareness about particular subject matter, leaving the audience to motivate itself to action.

The strategy also calls for the use of multiple mediums for information dissemination. The Internet and advertisements leading to kick-start campaign articles, ads, speeches, conferences, etc.

## **INFORMATIONAL CAMPAIGN**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The informational campaign portion of this plan will identify issues, messages and tactics to be used to implement the NUCFAC communication strategy. Because it is intended that the informational campaign portion of this plan be updated on a yearly basis, this section will map out activities through phase I, through December 2001. The strategic portion of the plan will remain in place until 2005 when it will be reviewed.

### **INFORMATIONAL CAMPAIGN GOAL**

The goal of the informational campaign portion of this plan is to employ strategies that previously have been identified to motivate urban-dwellers to plant trees.

## **ISSUES**

A. Most people are unaware of the social benefits derived from urban forests. Research on the social values of urban trees indicate the potential for improved public health through reduction of stress, greater enjoyment and satisfaction with living and working environments, and an enhanced sense of community coherence and environmental responsibility. (Social Value of Urban Forests/Green Infrastructure)

B. The tremendous environmental benefits of urban forests and green infrastructure sufficiently have not been reinforced to motivate people to plant trees. (Environmental Benefits of Urban Forests/Green Infrastructure)

C. One of the reasons important economic investments in urban forests are not being made is that people lack reliable information about the economic benefits that such investments will bring. (Environmental Benefits of Urban Forests/Green Infrastructure)

## **REACHING THE AUDIENCE**

As already stated, this campaign must have broad general appeal. It especially must appeal to all those urban-dwellers that have an ability to become involved in grass roots efforts to reforest urban landscapes. The campaign also must appeal to those individuals capable of influencing others. So while young and old alike should identify with our campaign, it is especially important that all those who are actively involved in their communities or are likely to become active identify with the campaign's message.

It is also important that these same individuals have at least a minimal interest in the environment through which an interest in community trees can be nurtured. Individuals like these will respond positively to an opportunity to share their interest in nature.

The three sub-problems addressed in the "Issues" section of the Informational Campaign adequately lend themselves to the creation of three rational messages, i.e. an economic message, a social message and an environmental message. These messages must be held together by one thread. And as the informational campaign section of this plan ties back to its strategy, it is noted that that thread is most effective when it is emotional, having an underpinning of rational arguments. That thread, or "over message," must form a bond between the audience and the NUCFAC "brand."

## **NUCFAC SLOGAN AND BRAND**

"Slogan," is a Celtic word meaning, "battle cry." Slogans are the words that define brands. A brand is a living entity that exists in the minds of the target audience as a personality, complete with values, character, and other emotional attributes. In other words, "We Bring Good Things to Life" is a slogan; how the audience feels about the

products represented by that slogan and what values are attributed to those products in the mind of the audience represent the brand.

Slogans usually are used in conjunction with a nonverbal symbol. Together, the slogan and the symbol define the personality of the brand. That personality should become a welcome part of the personalities of the target audience because it reflects some positive value they share. In the end, NUCFAC will fail if it alone owns the brand. NUCFAC will succeed if the audience owns the brand, for example:

## **LEAVE A SHADY LEGACY**

### **MESSAGE PRECURSOR -- DEFINING THE TERMS**

Anecdotal evidence indicates that the general public is unaware of what is meant by the term “urban forest.” They do not understand how a puny sapling in the heart of Time Square, for example, is part of any forest, urban or otherwise. Therefore, this plan suggests that the term “urban forest” not be used in any public information materials, i.e. ads, billboards, bumper stickers, etc.

In place of the term “Urban Forest,” this plan proposes to use the terms:

- “Community Trees”
- “Urban Trees”
- “Neighborhood Trees”

These terms will be defined as the trees on the street median and sidewalk; and the trees, plants and other green infrastructure in community parks, neighborhoods, and backyards.

### **MESSAGES/HEADLINES**

- A. The Social Value of Urban Forests/Green Infrastructure  
“Plant two trees and call me in the morning.”

#### Talking Points:

1. Community trees have important human values that reach into the safety, health and well being of our families and us as individuals.

2. Research has shown that community trees contribute to reduced human stress, improved patient recovery, and enhanced psychological health, making green infrastructure desirable for the neighborhoods in which our families live.

3. Neighborhood trees influence people's feelings and moods. They provide aesthetic enjoyment, and foster deeply felt connections between people, their communities and their environments.

4. Community trees make for a more healthy and satisfying life.

B. The Environmental Benefits of Urban Forests/Green Infrastructure  
“What’s good for them is great for you.”

Talking Points:

1. Animals depend on trees for their health and prosperity. Trees also help your health and prosperity too by providing fantastic environmental benefits.

2. Community trees and green infrastructure have enormous environmental values including climate control; soil erosion protection; carbon dioxide and O<sub>2</sub> balancing; filtering of pollution; energy conservation; and providing wildlife habitat.

3. There are hundreds of bird species that depend on urban trees for their homes, along with squirrels and other of nature’s creatures. Neighborhood trees, and trees in a backyard, can bring nature closer to your kitchen window.

4. Animals aren’t the only ones that depend on trees. For humans, a properly placed tree can help shade a single-family house in summer and protect it from winter winds. It’s evident; trees are good for them and great for you.

5. Research has shown that community forests provide environmental benefits including noise insulation, improved air quality, improved water retention and improved water quality.

C. The Economic Benefits of Urban Forests/Green Infrastructure  
“Some places are made in the shade.”

Talking Points:

1. Trees have long been recognized for their aesthetic value, especially in highly developed areas. But they also have enormous economic worth by contributing to the appreciation of property value and offsetting environmental and health costs.

2. Research has shown that neighborhood trees help produce a stronger sense of and appreciation for community. They enhance resident satisfaction and mobility, and increased worker productivity.
3. A properly placed tree can help shade a single-family house in summer and protect it from winter winds resulting in savings of up to \$180 per year in heating and cooling costs.
4. Community trees are just as important to meeting the needs of urban residents as sewers, streets, and electrical grids. In fact, families are more likely to buy a house when trees are nearby.

## **TACTICS**

Tactics for the 2000 - 2001 year largely will focus on increasing awareness of existing urban forestry programs, and increasing awareness of the benefits of trees. This will be accomplished through a series of national advertisements that direct people to a website for more information on how to plant trees and get involved in tree planting programs.

As this plan is revised and moves into future phases, the following additional tactics will be used: news releases, advertisements (including paid and donated space), articles, speeches, conferences, billboards and radio public service announcements. The following maps out a list of initiatives to be engaged.

### **Phase I – April 26, 2001-Dec. 31, 2001**

**A. Magazine Ads** -- This plan proposes the use of national magazine ads in keeping with the communication budget.

- **Who:** National news magazines
- **What:** Paid and donated ad space
- **Target Audience:** All listed
- **Goal:** To increase awareness of the benefits of trees and existing urban forestry programs, to persuade people to plant community trees, and to direct people to the website for more information.

**B. Radio Ads** -- This plan proposes the use of national radio ads in keeping with the communication budget.

- **Who:** National Radio
- **What:** Professional television and radio scripts
- **Target Audience:** All listed
- **Goal:** To direct people to the website for more information about the benefits of trees.

**C. Newspaper Ads** -- This plan proposes the use of national newspaper ads in keeping with the communication budget.

- **Who:** National newspapers
- **What:** Paid and donated ad space
- **Target Audience:** All listed
- **Goal:** To increase awareness of the benefits of trees and existing urban forestry programs, to persuade people to plant community trees, and to direct people to the website for more information.

**D. Internet Site** -- This plan proposes that a national Plant Trees campaign Internet site be created that provides more detailed information about urban forestry and its benefits. In addition, the site should direct interested parties to local organizations in their particular state and area.

- **What:** Create an Internet site that details urban forestry and its benefits, and directs people to local tree organizations.
- **Target Audience:** All listed
- **Goal:** To inform people about the social, environmental, and economic benefits of community trees and enhanced green infrastructure, and to persuade them to plant trees and become involved in tree planting programs.

**E. Kick-Start Campaigns** -- This plan proposes that local nationwide urban forestry programs use kick-start campaign materials to, as a force multiplier, draw attention to the national and local Plant Trees campaigns and their messages.

- **What:** Kick-start campaign tools.
- **Target Audience:** Community-based urban forestry programs
- **Goal:** To inform people about the social, environmental, and economic benefits of community trees and enhanced green infrastructure, and to persuade them to plant trees and become involved in tree planting programs.

## **Phase II – Jan. 1, 2002-Dec. 31, 2002**

**A. Utility Stuffers** -- This plan proposes partnering with interested utility companies -- gas, electric, and water -- to advance the cause of urban trees.

- **Who:** Gas, Electric, and Water companies
- **What:** Encourage prospective partner utility companies to underwrite printing cost and include informational material about the economic (energy) and environmental benefits of neighborhood trees in monthly energy bills.
- **Target Audience:** Urban Residents, Parents
- **Goal:** To increase awareness of the environmental and economic benefits of community trees and enhanced green infrastructure.

- **Note:** Utility companies that are often vilified for attacking the unspoiled beauty of the environment, may be interested as a way of redeeming their public image.

**B. Corporate Sponsored TV Commercials** -- This plan proposes approaching several large corporations that have national TV advertising campaigns and pitch to them ideas about including community trees in their commercials.

- **Who:** Scotts, Coleman, Black & Decker, Stanley, Lowes, Home Depot, Etc.
- **What:** Pitch ideas about including neighborhood trees in their commercials.
- **Target Audience:** Urban Residents, Parents
- **Goal:** To convince people about the benefits of neighborhood trees.
- **Note:** Selected companies should have a natural connection to environmental care and maintenance to increase the likelihood that they will agree to the pitch.

**C. Radio & TV PSAs** -- Because of the costs of public service announcements, this plan proposes that professional television and radio scripts be written and provided to the website for partner organizations who may wish to fund their production.

- **What:** Professional television and radio scripts
- **Target Audience:** All listed
- **Goal:** To inform people about the social, environmental, and economic benefits of community trees, and to persuade them to plant trees.

**D. TV Shows** -- This plan proposes that NUCFAC contact several TV shows, providing them with information about community trees in hopes that they will devote an episode or a segment to the subject matter.

- **Who:** Bob Villa: Home Again, Martha Stewart's Living, National Geographic Explorer, Discovery Channel, HGTV, Barbara Walters: The View, The Weather Channel
- **What:** Provide information about community trees and pitch potential episode/segment ideas
- **Target Audience:** Urban Residents, Parents, Landscape Architects, Land Developers, and Homebuilders
- **Goal:** To inform people about the social, environmental, and economic benefits of community trees and enhanced green infrastructure, and to persuade them to invest time, energy and capital in designing, cultivating and maintaining urban trees.

**E. News Releases** -- This plan proposes that news releases -- mostly feature stories that discuss the social, environmental and economic benefits of trees -- be written and released to targeted publications.

- **Who:** National news magazines, partner publications, garden sections of local newspapers, and other government publications
- **What:** News releases about trees' social, environmental and economic benefits.
- **Target Audience:** All listed
- **Goal:** To inform people about the social, environmental, and economic benefits of community trees and enhanced green infrastructure.
- **Note:** Likely national magazines would include National Geographic and Discover. In addition, some publications may be interested in using their own staff to publish an article based on a Plant Trees news release.

**F. Billboards** -- This plan proposes a billboard campaign that highlights planting and maintaining trees as a part of good citizenship.

- **What:** Billboard advertisements placed on major thoroughfares for commuters.
- **Target Audience:** All listed
- **Goal:** To persuade them to plant trees.
- **Note:** The billboard campaign represents an opportunity to use a celebrity to promote community trees.

**G. Plant Trees Media Events** -- This plan proposes two media events for 2002 or 2003: “Arbor Day Tree Challenge” and Celebrity Tree Plantings at home state Arbor Day celebrations.

#### **A. Arbor Day Tree Challenge Proposal**

Arbor Day Tree Challenge is designed to draw wide national and local media attention to the Plant Trees campaign using the nation’s first state Arbor Day celebrations.

Each year Florida and Louisiana celebrate Arbor Day on the third Friday of January. This plan proposes that the governor of one of these states challenges the governor of the other state to a tree-planting contest. The state that plants the most trees wins.

The loser of the contest agrees to plant the winner’s state tree on the winner’s state capitol lawn on National Arbor Day held in April. The state tree of Florida is the Cabbage Palmetto; the state tree of Louisiana is the Baldcypress.

A friendly challenge will draw local media coverage leading up to the event as well as on the day of the event. National media also would be interested in the event and its outcome, and is likely to cover the winners and losers. In addition, national media certainly will be interested to cover the challenge payoff, Gov. Jeb Bush of Florida planting a tree on Gov. Murphy Foster’s Louisiana state capitol lawn, for example. The occasion can be used to deliver speeches about the value of community trees.

#### **B. Celebrity Tree Plantings Proposal**

Celebrity Tree Planting can be used to draw statewide attention to NUCFAC messages by way of state Arbor Day celebrations. In many cases, well known celebrities can be invited to return to their home states during that state’s celebration of Arbor Day to plant a tree at their high school alma maters. In addition, if it can be arranged, the governors of those states, or other high profile elected official, along with a few lucky students should be on hand to help with the planting. The elected official can deliver a short speech about the value of community trees. Any number of events could be generated within this framework.

As a side note, the celebrity participants should be entreated to lend their voices to Plant Tree public service announcements that will run statewide in each respective state.

## INFORMATIONAL CAMPAIGN TIMELINE/MILESTONES

**Note:** This timeline is not comprehensive, but it gives an idea of activities that will be associated with implementing the long-term communication strategy and the information campaign. This timeline will be amended as more accurate information is acquired.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Who Is Responsible</b>
<b>Mid-September</b>	Draft Long-Term (LT) Communication plan, review by Comm. Group	WO OC (Mixon)
	Campaign Icons/Proofs from USDA	USDA (Cuevas)
	Comments on LT Comm. Plan returned from Comm. Group	CommGroup
	Develop media database for NUCFAC audiences	WO OC (Mixon & Alvarado)
<b>October 5</b>	Identify budgetary needs	USDA (Sutton)
<b>October 12</b>	Present LT Comm. Strategy and campaign support material to NUCFAC. Gain concurrence.	WO OC & USDA (Lennon & Mixon & Cuevas)
<b>Late-October</b>	Update Comm. Strategy and send hardcopies to partners; ensure conformance with existing efforts	WO OC (Mixon)
	Finalize campaign icons/proofs and mockups of informational material	USDA (Cuevas)
<b>Early-November</b>	Contract for and accomplish Mall Intercept survey	USDA (Sutton)
	Develop Internet site	TBD
	Develop NUCFAC Brochure	USDA (Cuevas) USDA (Sutton) WO OC (Mixon)
<b>Mid-November</b>	Evaluate Mall Intercept results and incorporate slogan and logo into ad materials and other products	USDA
	Produce ad materials; Purchase advertisement space for inclusion in Jan. and Feb. magazines	USDA (Cuevas) USDA (Sutton)
<b>Early-January</b>	Create Radio & TV PSA scripts	NUCFAC
<b>March 26</b>	Finalize NUCFAC Internet site	TBD
<b>April 14</b>	Launch Internet Site	TBD
<b>October</b>	Conduct 6 Month Audience Awareness Survey, (Tentative)	TBD
<b>November</b>	Analyze Survey Results	TBD

## **EFFECTIVENESS MEASURES**

This plan suggests two effectiveness measures: survey of community-based urban forestry programs and Internet site measurements.

### **Random Sample of Existing Urban Forestry Programs**

A request for feedback letter should be sent nationally to existing, community-based urban forestry programs to determine the effectiveness and helpfulness of the Plant Trees campaign.

### **Internet Site Measurements**

Survey visitors who visit the Plant Trees website regarding their knowledge gain as a result of the Plant Trees campaign by using a simple feedback form. At a minimum, the number of hits on the Internet site can be tracked to determine if people are being driven to seek out more information as a result of the campaign.

Note: In addition to the above-mentioned measures, a survey tracking the attitudes and beliefs of the target audience over time may be beneficial.