COLORADO SPRINGS TREE CANOPY 21,331 Acres 17 Percent

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PURPOSE OF THIS ANALYSIS

The City of Colorado Springs is located within El Paso County, Colorado (Figure 1). It is approximately 195 square miles or 124,949 acres of which 124,362 are land acres. Across the City, trees along streets, in parks, yards, and natural areas constitute a valuable urban and community forest. This resource is a critical element of the region's green infrastructure, contributing to environmental quality, public health, water supply, local economies and aesthetics. Colorado Springs has placed a high priority on ensuring the long-term health of its urban forest resource. The City has been a Tree City USA community since 1977, longer than any other in Colorado, meaning they have a forestry department, employ a community tree ordinance, spend at least $2 per capita on urban forestry, and celebrate Arbor Day.

This assessment is another step in the City's demonstrated commitment to protecting, maintaining, and expanding the City's tree canopy. The primary goal of this assessment was to provide a baseline and benchmark of the City's tree canopy and interpret the results across a range of geographic boundaries. Since this is the first time the urban forest in Colorado Springs has been assessed at such a scale, canopy change over several time periods was also analyzed using historical imagery, and a public survey was conducted to engage the City's residents and inform future prioritization and planning efforts. In addition, a sample street tree inventory of 5,000 trees was conducted to measure individual trees and assess risk or management needed. The inventory complements the canopy analysis by helping the City understand how and why the canopy is changing and providing targeted locations for resource management.

URBAN TREE CANOPY IN COLORADO SPRINGS

Results of this study indicated that in 2015, the City of Colorado Springs contained 17 percent urban tree canopy (or 21,331 of the City's 124,949 total acres); 30 percent non-canopy vegetation (37,445 acres); 20 percent soil/dry vegetation (25,690 acres); 32 percent impervious (39,896 acres); and 0.5 percent water (587 acres). Of the City's 83 percent of land area not presently occupied by tree canopy, 29 percent (35,584 acres) was suitable for future tree plantings, and 54 percent (67,447 acres) was unsuitable due to its current land use or other constraint. In further dividing the City's urban tree canopy, 89 percent was classified as tree canopy, and 11 percent of all canopy was identified as scrub vegetation.

ASSESSMENT BOUNDARIES

This study assessed urban tree canopy (UTC) and possible planting areas (PPA) at multiple geographic scales in order to provide actionable information to a diverse range of audiences. By identifying what resources and opportunities exist at these scales, the City can be more proactive in their approach to protect and expand their urban tree canopy. Metrics were generated at the following geographic scales: the citywide boundary (1); city council districts (6); watersheds (12); ZIP Codes (28); neighborhoods (77); census block groups (295); census blocks (10,883); land use types (non-aggregated: 37,346; aggregated 61); and parcels (157,343).

RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of this analysis can be used to develop a continuing plan and strategy to protect and expand the urban forest in Colorado Springs. The UTC and PPA metrics should be used as a guide to determine where the City has been successful in protecting and expanding its urban forest resource, while also targeting areas to concentrate future management efforts based on needs, benefits, and available planting space. Colorado Springs can use these results to both educate the community about the importance of the urban forest and ensure their policies and management practices continue to prioritize its maintenance, health, and growth.