



Guide for Community Leaders: Replanting trees after natural disasters

How Trees Help Our Communities

Trees provide a sense of home. Trees around homes, businesses and throughout the community improve air quality, energy efficiency, stormwater runoff reduction, public health and economic benefits.

When a natural disaster strikes, the urban forest suffers, and the community loses some of these benefits. After immediate public safety issues are addressed, volunteers, community leaders and city staff can work together to assess and manage existing trees and develop a planting plan. Each natural disaster and community forest is unique; however, lessons from past disasters can help towns working to recover and replant now.

Staff from Trees Forever and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IL DNR) can help you think through a recovery plan that meets your needs and situation.

“The planting of new trees helped to make our subdivisions more complete and give them a greater sense of place. A subdivision doesn't really become a neighborhood until there are other eye-catching features such as trees.

*Jon Oliphant, Planning and Development Director
Washington, IL*



Photo: Blake Blumenshine

Immediate Response

Safety first

Remember the dangers of downed trees and power lines. Communicate to citizens to stay away from downed trees near the utility lines and call the appropriate utility companies or city officials.

Watch for scams or people bearing chain saws

Consider requiring tree care businesses to provide proof of insurance and/or bonding. Be prepared ahead of time by having a registration for approved tree care companies at city hall.

Handling waste wood

You will also have to deal with a large amount of waste wood from downed trees. Identify an area that is large enough to contain tree storm debris. Consider how the wood will be utilized (mulch, fire wood, other) and if you will provide that product to the public.

Evaluating Existing Trees

After removing tree debris and hazardous damaged or hanging limbs, decisions need to be made about if trees should be removed, saved or what kind of corrective pruning needs to be done. Many factors are in play when making this decision. **Seek out experts to work with a group of local citizens to make decisions about tree removal.** Your municipal forester or certified arborists can help. The Illinois DNR can call in a Strike Team to help assess your trees for safety.

Assessing and Managing Existing Trees

Many factors go into making the decision to cut down a tree. The list below can provide you with some general guidelines. **We still recommend that you seek out the advice of experts including city foresters or certified arborists.** Things to consider:

- The tree's health prior to the disaster
- The tree's age. Contact an arborist or city forester if it is unique or has historical value.
- The tree's suitability to its site
- The potential for future injury (For example, the same area might be prone to flooding again)
- The timing of the natural disaster (during the growing season or when the tree was dormant)
- Species (For example, a damaged ash tree would not be as important to save as a mature oak.)
- Adjacent trees (Is the tree the only one providing benefits in an area vs. a tree growing among other healthy trees?)
- Extent of damage. **In general, remove the tree if more than 50 percent of the crown has been lost, more than 1/3 of the circumference of the trunk damaged, or if the tree leans more than 45 degrees.**
- History of the tree's stressors. Keep in mind that a tree that has been weakened by flooding, strong winds, ice or hail is less vigorous and may be more prone to a secondary insect or disease attack or more negatively affected by an environmental condition such as an unusually cold winter.



Following a natural disaster citizens and experts should assess trees together to consider the many factors involved with saving or removing damaged trees.

Remember, removing a tree unnecessarily that could potentially recover means a large and immediate loss of many tree benefits. If you decide to keep the tree, continue to monitor its health. Sometimes the damage is not visible for several years. **Plan to do periodic reassessments, for example at six months or one year** depending upon available resources.



Finding Certified Arborists

A specially trained arborist certified in hazard tree assessment can assist communities after natural disasters to determine which trees should be removed. The International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) lists certified arborists and those with ISA Tree Risk Assessment Qualification certification in your area:

<http://ww2.champaign.isa-arbor.com/findanarborist/findanarborist.aspx>

Cities also often keep a list of approved area tree companies for citizens to use.

Getting Organized for Replanting

10 Ideas to Get Started:

- 1 Develop a tree committee** if there is not currently one. If there is one, assess its makeup and consider adding new people that bring skills and energy to the intense storm recovery planning work. Post-natural disaster is a critical time to have volunteers and community leaders involved with decision making in partnership with city staff.
- 2 Develop a communications plan.** How will you communicate with volunteers about tree plantings, maintenance days, etc.? Consider using a Facebook page, website or media stories to spread the word. Determine who is in charge of communications.
- 3 Communicate with donors and volunteers** within and outside of the community to let them know when and how they can most appropriately help.
- 4 Manage tree donations.** To ease donors' minds, incorporate a tentative timeline for when the community may be ready. Remember to record all donations in order to thank them in a timely manner. Also know it is all right to say "no thank you" to a donation.
- 5 Work with multiple partners** such as Trees Forever, Extension and DNR Forestry to hold public educational workshops. Topics may include tree selection, hazard tree assessment, planting, care and funding options for replanting.



It is critical to develop tree committees comprised of citizens who work with city and other public entity staff to make important decisions after a natural disaster.

Plan Before You Plant

Natural disasters can provide opportunities to rebuild a healthier community forest. Prevention and preparedness are the keys for healthy tree cover.

- Plant the right tree in the right place. Watch for utility lines and distance from buildings.
- Plant trees that will survive and give them the space they need, both above and below ground.
- Diversify species.
- Spread out plantings over time.
- Select trees that are adapted to local weather conditions while maintaining a diversity of species.
- Plan for long-term tree care: water regularly, fertilize as needed and prune away dead/dying or broken branches.

- 6 Develop strategies to replant** on both public and private property. Parks, streets, downtown, entryways, schools and residential areas are typical areas to plant and they may all have different resources and stakeholders. Prioritizing these areas, or prioritizing geographically, will help break down the large task of replanting into smaller pieces.
- 7 Create a several-year plan** to replant so tree maintenance is not overwhelming. Don't sacrifice quality tree plantings under the pressure to replant quickly.
- 8 Inventory surviving trees** to ensure a healthy community forest by replanting a diverse species mix.
- 9 Plan community tree plantings** and replant together. Planting trees strengthens the social bonds between community members and promotes mental well-being during the recovery process. Many people can be involved so that a heavy burden does not fall on one group or a few staff people. Service clubs, youth groups such as Scouts, 4H, and FFA, church groups, and students can all play a role in replanting.
- 10 Recognize and celebrate** volunteers, citizens, city workers and others involved. Consider an award ceremony, media stories about exceptional volunteers and/or highlighting individuals on social media.

Creating a Timeline - Tips for Community Leaders

The timing of replanting is tricky!

Pull together an initial meeting of the tree board (new or revamped) and outside partners, such as Trees Forever, Extension, DNR Forestry and utilities, to discuss who can offer what services and expertise and recommendations.

Don't feel like your community is going through it alone. Unfortunately, many communities have been through natural disasters before. Those communities have learned things that can be very helpful and can save your community time.



- Determine **time, frequency and location of tree committee meetings.** More decisions will need to be made in a short amount of time so consider meeting more frequently and keeping good notes of meeting discussions.
- Early on develop a **communications plan** to help keep the public, potential donors and volunteers informed of replanting plans.
- After discussing all the potential areas in town that need to be replanted (downtown, streets, parks, schools, residential, entryway, etc.), prioritize and consider when timing makes the most sense for each area. **Plan projects that are achievable for your community's resources** - both for planting and maintenance.
- Developing a **strategy on timing** can help the community pace itself. **The community may not be ready to replant at the same time as people are offering donations.** Perhaps plant a symbolic tree now, then wait a season or more before doing a larger planting.
- Consider a small planting at an appropriate anniversary of the storm- six months, one year, etc. for the **morale boost** tree plantings can provide.

Supported by:



Trees Forever
Members

Join Trees Forever on its mission to plant and care for trees and the environment by empowering people, building community and promoting stewardship.

©2017 Trees Forever. All rights reserved.



TREES FOREVER
Planting a better tomorrow™

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

Trees Forever's *Recover, Replant, Restore!*

- Volunteer coordination for clean-up and replanting in your community
- Building and facilitating a tree committee or tree board
- Reviewing and making suggestions to update tree ordinances and/or work with the community to obtain Tree City USA status
- Holding workshops on tree selection, proper tree planting and care, diseases and stressors

Call (800) 369-1269 to find out how Trees Forever's *Recover, Replant and Restore* program can help. For information on proper tree planting and care:

www.treesforever.org/Guides

Illinois Department of Natural Resources

www.dnr.illinois.gov/conservation/forestry/urbanforestry

(319) 373-0650 • (800) 369-1269
www.treesforever.org
770 7th Avenue • Marion, IA 52302