

FINAL REPORT

Strengthening our Community Tree Canopy Through Education - 11 / 32

An educational initiative entitled Strengthening our Community Tree Canopy through Education, commenced in April of 2012 in Palm Beach County. This comprehensive program serves as the cornerstone for development towards a comprehensive urban and community forestry program. Funding for this project was provided by the USDA Forest Service through the Florida Forest Service's Urban and Community Forestry Grant Program.



Funds received through this program allowed Palm Beach County to hire a new Urban Forestry Program Assistant. This grant supported the development of eleven research-based urban forestry presentations and supporting materials. Twenty-seven presentations were conducted, reaching 428 professionals and 324 residents and Master Gardeners. Eleven reusable learning objects (RLOs) for professional and residential audiences were developed, narrated, and made available online. These videos are accessible to all, along with assessment questions that are available for teachers and self-study. These materials are available at www.pbcgov.com/coextension/horticulture/urbanforestry.htm. Trainings were conducted with volunteer Master Gardeners to enhance their knowledge about urban forestry and appropriate tree care so that they can better advise the public and conduct their own presentations. Finally, many partnerships and relationships have been created and nurtured throughout the county and state, through the use of a holistic, community-centered approach that has nurtured citizen involvement and support. The relationships developed and the broad reach of our programming has been made apparent through the sheer number of consulting requests and major urban forestry projects our team has been invited to collaborate on. For example, many community planting projects have reached out to our grant team for technical advice prior to planting trees; local government officials have asked for our advice on best management practices in implementing new policies or ordinances that would directly impact the urban forest. We consider this a huge success as it has allowed for better care of existing trees, selection of the right tree for the right place, and the new planting of high quality, structurally sound trees.



The sustainable nature of this project means that materials will be available for use to all, at no cost. For many residents and professionals, this program has provided the first exposure to urban forestry education. With the multifaceted approach chosen for educational delivery, we believe that more people have and will be reached through their preferred method of learning, whether by online RLOs or facilitator-led presentations.

We are beginning to see environmental benefits of this project which includes better management of our urban canopy by professionals and residents, increased species diversity, greater use of the "right tree, right place" principle, and more structurally sound urban trees through proper pruning and better canopy management decisions. Even initially, the educational value of this project seems to be extensive, due to the opportunity to provide education through two highly effective and sustainable methods of delivery. The educational opportunities provided have raised awareness, within and beyond the county, on species diversity, importance of tree canopy, proper pruning, planting, establishment, design, hazard tree assessment, remediation, and other important topics.

The Palm Beach County Board of County Commissioners wishes to express sincere gratitude to the US Forest Service, state political leaders, and the Florida Forest Service for providing the technical and financial support to implement an urban forestry program in Palm Beach County.

