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The Science and Practice of Managing Forests in Cities: Introduction to the Special Issue

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The Science and Practice of Managing Forests in Cities: Introduction to the Special Issue

The following special issue includes a practitioner note that provides context about Forested Natural Areas in cities and introduces eight themes that are explored in the 25 practitioner case studies. This publication is the product of a fruitful workshop that brought together leaders in the field of Forested Natural Areas management. The case studies document both widespread approaches that are being used in cities across the U.S., as well as innovation that is taking place in individual cities. The goals of both the workshop and this publication are to raise national awareness of urban forested natural areas, improve their management, and contribute to a community of practice.

In the United States, natural areas make up 84%, or 1.7 million acres of urban parkland (Trust for Public Land 2017). These natural areas are an important form of "nearby nature" that contribute to the health and wellbeing of the four out of five Americans who live in cities. These spaces are also critical for protecting biodiversity and mitigating the impacts of climate change. This special issue of *Cities and the Environment*, "Forests in Cities" focuses on a vital component of urban nature: urban forested natural areas.

While the term "urban forest" commonly refers to all trees within a city, including street trees, landscaped trees, trees on private property, and forested natural areas. "Forested natural areas" are the "woods" in cities. They are made up of more than just trees. Roots grow in a complex soil microbiome, leaves and fallen wood cover the forest floor, and trees in all stages of their life cycle are all components of this dynamic system. These areas support plant and animal communities.

Forested natural areas are unevenly distributed across urban landscapes, often found in parkland or nature preserves that have been protected from city development. While they may represent only a small portion of a city's canopy cover, they frequently contain a significant portion of that city's trees. For example, in New York City, forested natural areas make up 5.5% of the city land area, 25% of the total tree canopy, they contain the majority of the city's trees (Pregitzer et al. 2019).

Sustaining healthy urban natural areas requires devoted management and long-term investment. In 2018, the Natural Areas Conservancy — in partnership with The Trust for Public Land and the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies — conducted a national survey to learn how organizations that manage the nation's urban natural areas are approaching their efforts. In 2019, the Natural Areas Conservancy published those survey findings in a report titled *Untapped Common Ground: The Care of Forested Natural Areas in American Cities* (Pregitzer et al. 2019). This report provides an inspiring first look at how over 100 organizations across America are protecting and restoring their cities' forested natural areas.

In October, 2019, the NAC convened teams representing 12 American Cities or regions (Austin, TX; Baltimore, MD; Billings, MT; Chicago Metro Region, IL; Houston, TX; Indianapolis, IN; Miami - Dade County, FL; New York City, NY; St. Louis, MO; Seattle - Puget Sound, WA; Tampa - Hillsborough County, FL; and The Twin Cities, MN). These city teams were joined by representatives from the United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service and American Forests. Over the course of the week the group came together to celebrate successes, discuss shared challenges, and explore opportunities for collaboration.

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