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Langdon Park Forest Patch: How three women turned their tree rescue efforts into a public-private partnership in community-based forest stewardship.

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Langdon Park Forest Patch: How three women turned their tree rescue efforts into a public-private partnership in community-based forest stewardship.

Early in the COVID-19 pandemic, community tree activists engaged in tree rescue activities in Washington, D.C.'s Langdon Park. They cleared non-native invasive vines and cataloged native tree species within the park's 2.2-acre forest patch. Over the last 2+ years, they endeavored to share their story of forest stewardship, garnering support from district agencies and local non-profit Casey Trees. The ensuing collaboration has led to a healthier forest with greater community connection.

Keywords

urban forest management, urban ecology, community engagement, invasive species, stewardship, forest restoration

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CONTEXT

In 2019, two neighbors, Delores Bushong, a trained tree advocate, and Mary Pat Rowan, a native-plant specialist, attended a Casey Trees-sponsored Tree Summit and heard a presentation on the value of urban forest patches. They recognized a patch in their community in NE D.C.'s Langdon Park. The small forest, found on maps dating back to 1861, had become overrun by vines, was uninviting, and appeared unsafe. Langdon Park is located in Ward 5, a historically black community, and the woods are adjacent to residential and industrial zones. Significantly, the forest offers essential ecosystem services as the park is located in the Hickey Run watershed, which connects to the Chesapeake Bay and appears as a cool spot amid a large heat island. The two women recognized the value of their forest and set about rescuing trees.

GOALS

Goal	Outcome
Increase health of the forest patch.	Removal of non-native invasive vines from 1,000+ trees by community volunteers. Engagement with park agencies to adjust vegetation management practices along the boundaries of the forest patch.
Support safe public interaction with the forest patch.	Creation and installation of perimeter signage naming Langdon Park Forest Patch. Development of a new trail with tree identification signage, allowing public access to the interior of the forest patch.
Engage partners in long-term management of the forest patch.	Ongoing citizen science project to monitor natural regeneration within four survey plots. Built a coalition to support current and future site stewardship.

APPROACH

Three significant events shaped this effort. First, community members attended a local Tree Summit, which inspired them to begin their work rescuing trees. They flagged and identified young trees along the forest edge and began the arduous work of removing non-native invasive vines from the trees. Second, they discovered an illicit clearing performed by a neighbor. The discovery illustrated that the community held diverse ideas about the forest, and proper stewardship would necessitate better coordination and outreach. They re-doubled their communication efforts with the community, city agencies, and Casey Trees. Finally, they formed a loose coalition of partners, working together to restore the clearing by planting 25 new trees. Within a year, 150+ native tree seedlings naturally regenerated. Allison Clausen, a neighbor and graduate student, joined their team and designed a forest-wide research project to explore the reasons for the explosion of seedlings and their potential for replication.

The collaborative work of persistent volunteers, open city agencies, and a supportive non-profit is the crux of the success of this project. First, Delores and Mary Pat are expert communicators, keeping relevant parties informed and doggedly pursuing responses. Additionally, the stewards dedicated hundreds of hours of fieldwork to bettering the forest.

The stewards' determination was met with resounding encouragement from city agencies. With Jim Woodworth (DOEE) as their primary advocate, the tree stewards received resources, contacts, permissions, and expertise from DDOT Urban Forestry, Parks and Recreation, and other agencies. UFAC provided a platform to share the LPFP story at a city-wide level. Additionally, Nancy Sonti (USFS) provided expertise in shaping the citizen science project.

Casey Trees played a critical role in the success of this project. First, they invested in Delores with their advocacy and tree care training. For all three women, the Tree Summits were galvanizing events. In LPFP, they were an active partner at every step, providing technical and physical support.

RESOURCES

Funding: While the key collaborators (Delores, Mary Pat, and Allison) are volunteers, a small Community Stormwater Solutions grant (~\$25k) from DOEE to Casey Trees leveraged assistance in trail building, volunteer organizing, communications efforts, and other support.

The tree planting was funded from a larger, existing multi-year tree planting grant from DOEE to Casey Trees, funded by DDOT's Tree Fund.

Technical Assistance: Many partners provided technical assistance, including USFS guidance for citizen science survey plots, Casey Trees GIS data and mapping, and DOEE design of LPFP signage.

KEY RESULTS

- **Innovative Restoration/Management** of the Langdon Park Forest Patch has been accomplished through community volunteer-led non-native invasive removal, and a comprehensive flagging and monitoring of young trees and citizen science projects. These efforts are expected to continue sustainably with the hope of developing a formalized management plan for LPFP as a model to be exported across the city.
- **Organizing and Community Engagement** were conducted primarily through resident efforts to build a coalition of partners engaged in the site. Non-profit partners were engaged to apply for grant funds to amplify the message, organize volunteers, install signage, and build a recreational trail to welcome the community into the forest patch.
- **Cross-Sector Partnerships** were established between residents, district agencies, and non-profits, which helped to secure grant funding for the project via streamlined district permitting and approval processes, and resulted in a stewarded forest patch that the district alone did not have the capacity to manage. Partners anticipate advocating for future funding and resources for forest stewardship across the district, professionalizing the work to support paying jobs.

Contact and additional resources:

DDOT WEBSITE FOR POP-UP ARBORETUM:

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/c057bcabf4a84632bcaa58eba5b0da35>

CASEY TREES PROJECT INFORMATION: <https://caseytrees.org/2022/01/ready-to-go-go-join-us-for-a-community-conservation-event-at-langdon-park/>