Urban forests are an important green infrastructure asset for communities across Ontario. However, the capacity of urban forests to support healthy and resilient cities is constrained and challenged by stresses such as climate change impacts, urban development pressures, altered soils, and invasion species. Now more than ever there is a critical need to sustain large, healthy, genetically appropriate trees and shrubs on public and private land through long-term planning and budgeting, inclusive decision-making, and strategic policy development that supports adaptive management. Thus, comprehensive urban forest support must extend well beyond tree planting initiatives.

Management of urban forests is often considered the sole responsibility of municipal governments. In reality, responsibility should also be shared by private citizens, community groups, schools and other institutions, industry and provincial and federal governments. All of these groups have important roles to play. Successful management frameworks must recognize that the urban forest is part of a complex system that includes the built environment, and is influenced by human activities and policies and practices that shape Ontario’s urban regions. Furthermore, decision making must be made in the context of future uncertainty associated with climate change.

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1. Promote a collective agenda for necessary policy changes.
2. Create a platform for collaborative action towards key strategic priorities.
3. Support the exchange of resources, knowledge and expertise from across the province.

This Call to Action compliments existing strategies, policies and documents, and aims to initiate new actions in areas of particular concern to urban forest stakeholders in Ontario. It builds upon past efforts in order to create a cohesive path forward that has broad support from stakeholders across the sectors.

Many of the strategic priorities outlined in this Call to Action are in support of the outcomes outlined in the Canadian Urban Forest Strategy, a national strategic initiative of Canada’s urban forest practitioners.

Our next step will be working together to determine who will lead the identified actions. We invite all stakeholders to review this Call to Action, find themselves in it, and join the conversation.

GIO is committed to making this Call to Action a living document and evaluating our collective success in 2020.

Call to Action supporters:
- Baum Professional Tree Care
- Cabbagetown ReLEAF
- Citizens Environment Alliance of Southwestern Ontario
- City of Oakville
- City of Thunder Bay
- City of Toronto
- Credit Valley Conservation
- Deep Root
- Evergreen
- Forests Ontario
- Green Roofs for Healthy Cities
- Guelph Forest Friends
- Landscape Ontario Horticulture Trades Association
- LEAF (Local Enhancement and Appreciation of Forests)/More Trees 29
- Ontario Association of Landscape Architects
- Ontario Parks Association
- Ontario Urban Forest Council
- ReForest London
- Toronto and Region Conservation
- Toronto Parks and Trees Foundation
- Tree Canada
- University of Toronto, Faculty of Forestry
- York Region

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greeninfrastructureontario.org
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The Story So Far

The Urban Forest Call to Action was developed in consultation with diverse urban forest stakeholders. It identifies strategic priorities and recommends actions that will assist current and future stakeholders in their efforts to grow, protect, and sustain healthy urban forests.

Call to Action

Strategy/Philosophy

Gain formal multi-level government support and funding for planning and managing the urban forest as an integral urban infrastructure.

Action

• Develop and maintain a current list of specific policy recommendations for the provincial government.
• Track progress on provincial policy recommendations.
• Encourage action on priority policy recommendations by developing and sharing consistent messaging for use by all stakeholders.
• Develop an advocacy toolkit to support stakeholders in their urban forest advocacy efforts.

Outcomes

• A better list of provincial policy recommendations is utilized and contributed to by the stakeholders and partners.
• Provisions are made and tracked on provincial policy recommendations.
• Useful advocacy tools are identified, developed, disseminated, and used by stakeholders in pursuing support and funding for urban forestry.

Coordinated action in urban forestry at a provincial scale.

An online network map is published, connecting and linking all urban forests across the province.

Support municipalities, landowners, community groups, and other stakeholders in implementing Ontario’s urban forests.

• Demonstrates and shares international and local best practices in urban forestry.
• Develops a toolkit of strategies for obtaining provincial funding for urban forestry through provincial programs and policies.
• Identifies mechanisms whereby the provincial government can support the implementation of best management approaches to urban forest relationships.

• Creation and distribution of a best management practices manual which is updated at least every five years.
• Stakeholders obtain funding for urban forest stewardship through existing provincial programs and policies.
• Urban forest stakeholders identify a lead ministry for urban forestry and increase its support for municipalities and other stakeholders in the proactive management of Ontario’s urban forests.

Understand research and gaps in knowledge, tools, techniques and information.

• Identifies critical research questions and gaps in knowledge, tools, techniques and information for the general public and media.
• Create an urban forest centre for applied urban forest research that provides a source of information for the general public and media.
• Develop citizen science and citizen forestry tools and techniques that engage all residents in urban forest monitoring, stewardship and planning.

• Research gaps are continually identified and communicated to collaborative research.
• An urban forest applied research hub and/or center is created in a public or private institution.
• Research and tools related to urban forest planning, monitoring and management are readily available to all stakeholders.

Support for trees as a private property

• Not-for-profit organizations and community groups are playing an increasingly important role in engaging the community in urban forest stewardship on private lands.

Coordination, multi-level governance

• Invasive species outbreaks and extreme weather events have exposed the public to high levels of risk which have taxed the capacity in urban forest management. The need for proactive and consistent forest management frameworks is required.

Provincial leadership

• The provincial government has engaged in issue driven and reactive coordination. There is a need for coordinated multi-level government urban forestry programs to address risk mitigation associated with extreme weather events and invasive species outbreaks in collaboration with other Emergency Management Organizations.

Review the urban forest

• Science and research activities in other parts of the world, specifically the United States (e.g., USDA Forest Service), have supported urban forest planning and management, provided prototypes and, in general, raised the level of public awareness about the urban forest.

• The body of research and literature quantifying the social, ecological, economic and health benefits of urban forests has grown substantially.

Public Support for Trees as a Private Property

• Not-for-profit organizations and community groups are playing an increasingly important role in engaging the community in urban forest stewardship on private lands.

Coordination, Multi-level Governance

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Research on the Urban Forest

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Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF), Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH), Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MOECC)

Issue

governance

Coordinated, multi-level Governance

Provincial leadership

Tree nurseries

An Urban Forest Strategy

• Develop a toolkit of strategies for obtaining provincial funding for urban forests through provincial programs and policies.
• Identifies mechanisms whereby the provincial government can support the implementation of best management approaches to urban forest relationships.

Coordinated Action in Urban Forestry at a Provincial Scale

• An online network map is published, connecting and linking all urban forests across the province.

Support Municipalities, Landowners, Community Groups, and Other Stakeholders in Implementing Ontario’s Urban Forests

• Demonstrates and shares international and local best practices in urban forestry.
• Develops a toolkit of strategies for obtaining provincial funding for urban forests through provincial programs and policies.
• Identifies mechanisms whereby the provincial government can support the implementation of best management approaches to urban forest relationships.

Understand Research and Gaps in Knowledge, Tools, Techniques and Information

• Identifies critical research questions and gaps in knowledge, tools, techniques and information for the general public and media.
• Create an urban forest centre for applied urban forest research that provides a source of information for the general public and media.
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**The Story So Far**

The Ontario Urban Forest Call to Action was developed in consultation with urban forest stakeholders. It identifies strategic priorities and recommends actions that will assist current and future stakeholders in their efforts to grow, protect, and sustain healthy urban forests.

**Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF), Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH), Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MOECC)**

Coordinated, multi-level property support for trees on private lands.

- Provincial leadership
- Forest management frameworks
- Involve municipal associations, community groups, and other stakeholders.

- Strategic, sustained, and long-term urban forest stewardship, funding for planting and other stewardship or knowledge gaps, is needed in order to increase community capacity in urban forest management.

**Support for trees as private property**

- Not for profit organizations and community groups are playing an increasing, important role in managing the urban forest and providing education.

**Coordinated, multilevel governance**

- There is no coordinated multi-level government urban forestry program to address risk mitigation associated with extreme weather events and invasive species outbreaks in collaboration with other Emergency Management Organizations.

**Provincial leadership**

- The provincial government has engaged in issue-driven and reactive management practice between municipalities.

**Assessment of the urban forest**

- There is need for similar urban forest science and research support in Ontario, and its Canadian counterparts.

- There is need for strong urban forest science and research support in Ontario and its Canadian counterparts.

**Strategy/Philosophy**

- Engage with the provincial government in the development of an Ontario Urban Forest Strategy.

- Develop a toolkit of strategies for obtaining provincial funding for urban forestry through programs and policies.

-Develop an interactive map of urban forest plans and strategies, and identify commonalities, in vision, goals, and outcomes.

- Creative development of an Ontario Urban Forest Strategy.

**Support municipalities, landowners, community groups, and other stakeholders in growing Ontario’s urban forests.**

- Demonstrate and share international and local best practices in urban forests.

**Undertake research to increase knowledge, tools, techniques, and information**

- Identify critical research questions and potential funding opportunities for research and development.

- Create an urban forest centre for applied research to disseminate information for the general public and media.

- Develop citizen science and citizen ecology tools that allow all residents in urban forest monitoring, stewardship and planning.

- Research gaps are continually identified and addressed through collaborative research.

- Urban forest applied research hubs and/or sector- focused institutes in key strategic priority areas.

- Research and tools related to urban forest planning, monitoring and modeling are readily available to all stakeholders.
**The Story So Far**

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**CALL TO ACTION**

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