

Don't Sell the Value of Your Trees Short

Whether you believe that global climate change is a threat or not, the evidence is now pretty clear that properly managed urban trees appear to have a part in every science-based, sustainable solution. I say *part* because we obviously cannot plant and care for enough trees to correct all of the Earth's environmental problems. However, making sure trees are continually viewed as necessary elements of the solution is critical to our profession and the future quality of life for all.

How we as tree care professionals present the case for trees as key contributors to a stable environment is important. I spent a few days visiting David Nowak in Washington, D.C. in April. His work over the years at the U.S. Forest Service researching and quantifying the environmental benefits of trees was recently acknowledged by the scientific community at the highest level. Dave received a Nobel Prize for his work as a member of Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. The Nobel Committee recognized the IPCC for their "efforts to build up and disseminate greater knowledge about manmade climate change, and to lay the foundations for the measures that are needed to counteract such change." So when Dave speaks, I listen.

He emphasized that we need to be careful in our public relations efforts not to lock on to just one environmental benefit of trees when determining value—such as tons of carbon sequestered or energy savings—because science indicates that if you look at trees from the perspective of one single benefit, the net benefit becomes negligible.

Dave remains adamant that the benefits of urban trees be represented cumulatively, because when all of the benefits are included, the net effect of urban trees on the environment is a positive impact. For example, in New York City, it was determined that citizens receive more than five dollars of environmental benefits for each dollar invested in management of the urban forest.

I don't intend to discuss the science behind this calculation, but I will state that it is based on more than 20 years of peer-reviewed research. My purpose for bringing this up here is to help spread their message: The value of the cumulative environmental benefits provided by trees and landscapes can, in fact, be calculated, based on research.

Dave's U.S. Forest Service research peer Greg McPherson is very much in agreement. So much so that the two have combined their efforts at the U.S. Forest Service with other partners—such as The National Arbor Day Foundation, the Society of Municipal Arborists, the Environmental Protection Agency, Davey Tree Experts, and ISA—to develop and make available software that calculates these science-based benefits for arborists, urban foresters, landscape architects, other industry professionals and

policy makers to analyze and determine the value of the environmental services provided by trees.

All of this knowledge is available to you at the touch of a button. To those of you who have yet to learn about i-Tree, I recommend you take the time to visit iTreeTools.org. The software the website provides is free; all you need to do is request a copy. There are currently more than 3,000 copies of the software in circulation in 35 countries around the world.

A key misconception about i-Tree software is that it is only of value to an urban forester or municipal arborist. The program, I should mention, is scalable and has the capacity to quantify the environmental value of just one tree or as many as a city's entire tree inventory. It can be used just as easily to determine the value of trees on a golf course, park, or even a home owner's lot. The i-Tree software suite is not an inventory tool. It is a tool you use with the information gathered and stored in an inventory; if you have the data, you can use i-Tree to calculate the environmental benefits of a particular tree or urban forest.

I spend a great deal of time speaking to policy makers, and this software suite helps translate my message of the benefits of trees rather well to that group of people—and whether we like it or not, they are the ones who ultimately make the big decisions. With better information, they can make better decisions. There are numerous good examples that demonstrate how policy makers respond to reports generated from tools available in this program. The New York City urban forestry program received a significant increase to its budget once City Hall learned of the cumulative benefits provided to the city through its urban forest resource.

In Washington, D.C., the Casey Tree Foundation has used these tools to make the benefits of trees accessible to the individual home owner, raising the awareness of the value of the urban forest within the district. Visit www.CaseyTrees.org to see the value of the combined environmental benefits of trees in action.

In California, the Sacramento Tree Foundation is also using the combined benefits model through its Green Print, to develop and manage that region's urban forest. Visit www.sactree.com to learn more about this collaborative effort of 22 cities and four counties to deal with air-quality issues.

The point of this write-up is to make you aware of the i-Tree program and also to help you understand the value of communicating the cumulative environmental benefits of trees (urban trees in particular). ISA is a worldwide organization dedicated to fostering a greater appreciation for trees and to promoting research, technology, and the professional practice of arboriculture. By using tools like i-Tree, we can all do a better job of communicating our mission to make the world a better place, one tree at a time. 



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