

www.michigan.gov
(To Print: use your browser's print function)

Release Date: February 04, 2008
Last Update: February 25, 2008

More Michigan Communities Seek Tree City USA Designation

January 24, 2008

Michigan's forests are a tremendous asset for this state, but did you know that some of our greatest forest resources are literally just outside your front door. In fact, more than 15 percent of our total statewide tree cover is found in metro areas.

The next time you walk down a street in your neighborhood, take notice of the trees rising all about you. From the sturdy sugar maple planted in front of your house to the majestic oak that has stood in the local park for over a century, these trees, and other natural resources, collectively make up what is called the urban and community forest.

We don't often give much thought to who is taking care of the trees along our streets and in our parks, or planting new ones to ensure our community remains green and beautiful.

However, much like the road maintenance that occurs all around us, many communities have established programs to take care of the trees that stand over them.

And since 1976, these communities in Michigan and around the country have had an opportunity to be recognized for their efforts through a national award program.

The Tree City USA program, sponsored by the National Arbor Day Foundation, was conceived as a lasting legacy of the nation's bicentennial by promoting tree planting and care in urban areas and calling attention to the economic, health and aesthetic benefits provided by trees.



Today, the program is administered in each state by a designated natural resources agency. In Michigan, the program is administered by the Department of Natural Resources' [Urban and Community Forestry](#) program.

The goals of the program are simple but important:

- Encourage, support and strengthen effective urban forestry programs in diverse communities nationwide
- Recognize and reward communities for annual advancements in urban forestry
- Heighten public awareness and support for the health and vitality of urban forests
- Promote the state forester's office as a primary source of knowledge, expertise and technical support on urban forestry on a statewide basis
- Provide networking, educational opportunities and technical assistance to members of the urban forestry field.



Tree City awards are available to any municipality regardless of size. Participating communities in Michigan range from Richland (pop. 593) to Detroit (pop. 900,000).

The first communities in Michigan to participate in the program were Allegan, Birmingham, Hillsdale, Jackson, Oak Park, Royal Oak and St. Clair Shores.

In 2006, 111 Michigan communities achieved Tree City USA designation, and, according to Kevin Sayers, DNR Urban and Community Forestry program coordinator, three or four communities are being added to the list each year.

"One of the strengths of this program is that any community can participate," Sayers said. "Across Michigan and the country there is a growing appreciation of the importance of trees and the realization that a good tree care program is a wise investment for the future."

Certification requires each community to have: (1) a tree board or responsible department, (2) a community tree care ordinance, (3) a commitment to spend an average of at least \$2 per capita on tree-related activities and (4) an annual Arbor Day proclamation and observance.

Since it began, the program has helped America's communities expand and improve the health of their urban forests. The foundation's partnership with the U.S. Forest Service, the National Association of State Foresters, the National League of Cities and the U.S. Conference of Mayors has further enabled the program to develop a nationwide network of communities that plan and maintain urban forests.



What started in 1976 with 42 communities in 15 states has grown to 3,270 communities nationwide today. Of these, 99 percent recertify annually. Collectively, these communities have 120,496,878 residents and spend \$883 million on their urban forestry efforts.

Currently ninth among all states in total number of communities certified, Michigan's Tree City population includes 3,759,339 residents, whose communities spent nearly \$31 million, or approximately \$8 per capita, on tree care in 2006.

One question that Sayers gets most often is: What is the benefit for a community who wants to become a Tree City?

"First, it helps communities establish a foundation for effective, well-organized tree care programs," he said. "Each community receives two Tree City USA signs, a flag and a plaque and other education and marketing items."

But the real significance of these rewards, Sayers said, is that it helps create visibility for the program, which, in turn, often helps the community to create a positive public image and improved awareness.

"Each year, I hear from interested communities who would like to learn how to become a Tree City," Sayers said. "It's often because they have noticed a neighboring community was certified and they want the same recognition. They really just want to be involved."

And being involved is what it is all about -- from the Arbor Day Foundation and U.S. Forest Service to local communities and their residents. This collaboration of nonprofit, government and local citizen involvement are at the heart of making Tree City USA a powerful force for better community forests and tree care.

So, the next time you drive through a community with the Tree City USA sign or flag, you will know they are working to create a future for the community that is brighter and greener.

For more information, visit the [DNR Web site at www.michigan.gov/dnrucf](http://www.michigan.gov/dnrucf) or contact Kevin Sayers at (517) 241-4632; e-mail: sayersk@michigan.gov.