

AUGUST 2019

# RHODE ISLAND URBAN FORESTS FOR CLIMATE AND HEALTH INITIATIVE

Urban Forestry, Pilot Projects,  
Career Pathways, Health Equity



AMERICAN FORESTS  
- SINCE 1875 -

Priority Issue: Public Health & Climate

## WHY CLIMATE & PUBLIC HEALTH?

Cooling, Emissions, Mortality

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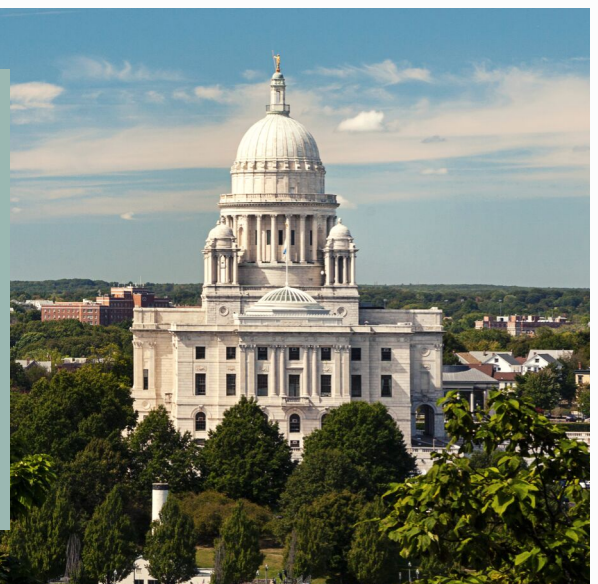
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**Climate:** Urban forests, the trees in and around cities, suburbs and towns, have long been overlooked as a solution in reducing global warming, but they contribute significantly to reducing the rate of global temperature increases. Urban forests in the U.S. currently sequester 1.8 percent of U.S. emissions and reduce residential energy use for heating and cooling by 7.2 percent. One major goal of this project is to define how much more U.S. urban forests can contribute to reducing global temperatures and create tools to achieve that goal in Rhode Island and then nationwide.

**Public Health:** The top public health threat from extreme weather is heat, which kills more people annually than all other weather events combined. Increasing temperatures will only exacerbate that and other health risks. Research from the Rollins School of Public Health projects a ten-fold increase in heat related deaths in eastern U.S. cities by 2050. Urban tree canopy is uniquely positioned to reduce urban heat islands, heat stress and mortality in cities. This project will strategically target tree canopy growth in the most health-vulnerable populations like low-income families with no air conditioning, and neighborhoods with high concentrations of youth and elderly.

### OUR PARTNERS:

*Doris Duke Charitable Foundation; Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management; Rhode Island Department of Health; Rhode Island Infrastructure Bank; U.S. Forest Service, including the Northern Institute of Applied Climate Science; City Forest Credits*



# The Toolkit

We are creating a suite of tools that Rhode Island municipalities can use to help their urban forestry programs reach their potential for climate mitigation, public health and environmental justice.

- **A Statewide Climate Goal:** We will establish a statewide carbon sequestration and energy use reduction goal based on county-level national research being conducted with the U.S. Forest Service's David Nowak as part of this initiative.

- **Tree Equity Score:** The score will be calculated for every block group and aggregated to represent each municipality in Rhode Island to help local partners determine how well their tree canopy is currently serving their most vulnerable populations and maximizing its climate mitigation potential.

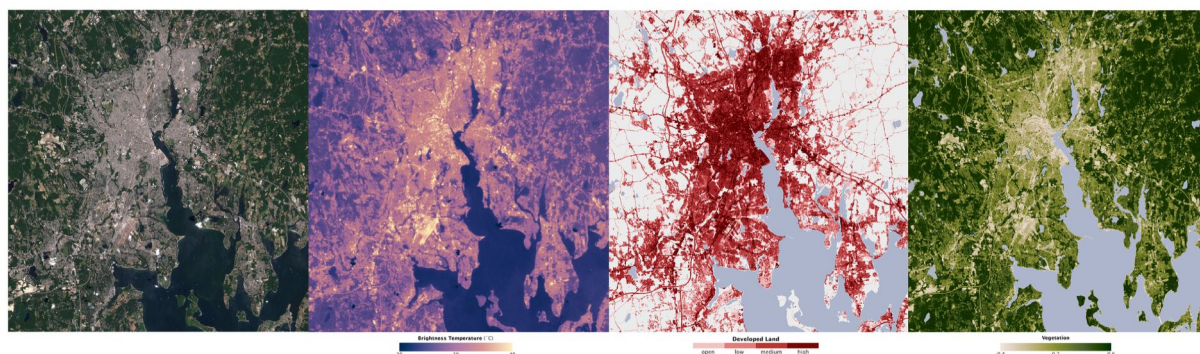
- **Climate & Health Forestry Action Guide:** Step-by-step guidance to help any city, nonprofit, or collaboration set goals and work flows while determining where there are gaps in urban forestry management for climate mitigation and public health.

- **Planter Tool:** A parcel-level, web-based mapping tool to help policymakers and urban foresters pinpoint locations where new tree plantings hold the most potential to maximize public health outcomes in neighborhoods that are most vulnerable to climate change.

- **Policy:** We are working to develop or support policy that generate investments in urban forests at the state and federal level. This will be achieved through a focused effort to strengthen and expand Rhode Island's advocacy network.

- **City Forest Credits:** This new voluntary carbon-plus credit market is specifically geared to trees in cities and towns. This initiative is increasing its operations capacity and working in both Rhode Island and nationwide to expand its market. Opportunities will be explored to activate this private finance mechanism in planting and preservation projects throughout Rhode Island.

- **Learning Labs and Workshops:** We will host a series of interactive workshops that will provide opportunity for input, training and support.



Satellite-produced maps of Greater Providence demonstrate that urbanized areas suffer most from the heat island effect. Development patterns and vegetation cover directly influence heat. Credit: NASA/Earth Observatory.



American Forests, the nation's oldest conservation organization, has selected Rhode Island to pilot a cutting-edge interactive urban forestry tool that promotes health equity and provides pathways for the state to reach its climate goal.