

West Virginia Tree Canopy Action Plan

Background

In March 2023, the [Chesapeake Bay Watershed Tree Canopy Funding and Policy Roundtable](#) convened 125 local and state leaders from across the Chesapeake Bay Watershed to address challenges and opportunities in advancing tree canopy goals throughout the region. Centered around the themes of equity, climate resilience, and tree loss, the event featured expert presentations as well as generative discussions to identify data, tools and approaches to strengthen tree canopy outcomes. The Roundtable was intended to lay the groundwork for each Chesapeake Bay state to develop a two-year **Tree Canopy Action Plan** that pinpoints priority funding, policy, and programmatic strategies to advance tree canopy goals.

West Virginia’s Priority Strategies

The priority strategies presented below were identified by a group of stakeholders from West Virginia who participated in pre- and post-Roundtable tree canopy strategy sessions and/or in discussion sessions at the Roundtable. These strategies were identified as having strong potential to advance tree canopy progress in the state in the near term. For each strategy, action steps and potential partners were identified.

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1. Increase the number of Tree USA-certified communities and organizations in West Virginia's portion of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.

Four incorporated communities out of twenty-one in West Virginia's portion of the Chesapeake Bay watershed are certified through the Arbor Day Foundation Tree City USA program. Given this program's success in advancing local tree canopy goals, increasing this number is a priority.

Opportunities for action	Who's involved
Complete West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection (WVDEP)'s effort to inventory potential Tree Cities and Tree Campuses within the state and compile contact information.	WVDEP
Contact the entities identified above to (1) make them aware of the benefits of becoming certified (such as ability to get grants to prune/replace trees and eligibility for state forestry grants), and (2) provide support to help them certified (such as sharing model ordinances and good case stories of West Virginia municipalities that are benefitting from certification).	WVDEP (leading effort) WVDOF (already involved; has model ordinances for WV)
Engage partners to assist with Tree City / Campus outreach and support, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - West Virginia University (WVU): hiring a new outreach coordinator who could help expand outreach and support to communities - West Virginia Department of Forestry (WVDOF): anticipated additional Forest Service funding for plantings could open the door to new partnerships with cities - West Virginia Conservation Agency: can help identify partners - Martinsburg: wants to be recertified; could be a model success story to help with outreach - Chesapeake Bay funds to support ordinance development 	WVDEP (leading effort) WVDOF Urban Forestry (provides technical and financial assistance) WVU WVCA City of Martinsburg
Launch WVDOF's Community Equi-Tree grant program (anticipated early 2024) to reach additional communities and support adoption of Tree City USA elements including formation of a tree board and adoption of municipal tree ordinance and budget.	WVDOF Urban Forestry (in progress)

2. Preserve and expand forests, especially through mechanisms that compensate landowners for protecting or expanding tree canopy and buffers.

While West Virginia isn't experiencing population growth, there is a need to address development and sprawl that affects tree canopy, especially in the Eastern Panhandle.

Opportunities for action	Who's involved
Conduct a survey of public sentiment and understanding of trees' ecosystem benefits, to help develop effective outreach material.	Lead TBD
Reinvigorate the Eastern Panhandle Conservation District's annual large tree contest to encourage residents to value and maintain mature trees. Leverage WVU Extension offices to help raise awareness about the importance of tree preservation on private property.	Conservation Districts WVU Extension
Convene a workgroup to investigate options for forest landowners, including farmers, to be financially compensated for preserving or expanding tree canopy through means such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conservation easements for small forest patches (especially intact riparian buffers) - Credits / payment for implementing best management practices to reduce nutrient loads and improve water quality - Payout system for incorporating green infrastructure 	Lead TBD
Invite a representative from the Chesapeake Bay Program or another entity to provide training (webinar, meeting, briefing papers) for state leaders to help them understand the urban forest carbon market and what would be necessary to take advantage of it.	Lead TBD Chesapeake Bay Program
Build a coalition of advocates to campaign for regulatory approaches to preserve trees, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - County tree law to require 40% canopy preservation during development - Country or local tree ordinances requiring equivalent or exceeding replacement of tree loss during new and redevelopment (like wetlands policy) 	Lead TBD Advocacy groups

3. Explore the potential for seed collection and local tree stock grow-out stations.

West Virginia needs a reliable source of affordable, high-quality stock of appropriate species for the region and climate. Local grow-out stations would meet this need with a smaller carbon footprint as well as reduce barriers related to out-of-state procurement. In addition, a seed collection program could help supply native stock as well as build awareness of the value of mature trees.

Opportunities for action	Who's involved
Investigate whether there is an existing inventory of nurseries, and which of these are growers versus dealers-only. Interview these nurseries to explore their appetite for growing stock of needed trees, as well as what would be needed to fill this gap (e.g. federal resources to support investment in large-scale tree production).	Lead TBD
Hold a meeting with the Potomac Conservancy, which used to run a large-tree seed collection program to supply local nurseries and grow-out stations. Determine why this program was stopped, what their current model is, and whether this program could be re-started or adopted by another organization.	Potomac Conservancy (just hired an Eastern Panhandle Conservation Manager who will also be the coordinator for the SWCC)
<p>Convene a meeting with the Department of Commerce, Department of Agriculture, and other interested economic development entities to explore opportunities for enhancing existing nurseries and developing public-private partnerships to establish additional West Virginia nurseries. Discuss:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Opportunities around green jobs and economic development - Potential to develop school nursery grow-out stations - Potential to re-start the Division of Forestry's bare-root seedling program 	<p>Lead TBD</p> <p>Department of Commerce (trying to build small businesses in the state)</p> <p>Department of Agriculture (regulates nurseries in the state as well as small tree farms, assisted by foresters)</p>
Investigate the potential for joint procurement vehicles to streamline the process of purchasing native stock.	Lead TBD
Stay engaged with the upcoming Chesapeake Bay Program Goal Implementation Team project to study nursery supply issues on a regional scale.	Lead TBD

4. Expand capacity of existing programs, and grow partnerships.

Existing programs at the WV DOF and the Cacapon Institute are strong, and partnerships can expand their capacity and reach. There are opportunities to grow the partnership of entities engaged in tree preservation and maintenance, including schools and large institutional landowners.

Opportunities for action	Who's involved
Leverage existing and planned partnerships to increase capacity for outreach, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - WVDOF's contract with WVU to provide a grant specialist to increase community outreach (funded 2024-2025) - WVDEP's new full-time staff member (funded through Vista) whose work will be to engage watershed associations - Coordination effort between Canaan Valley Institute and Potomac Conservancy regarding aligning their riparian buffer planting program. 	WV DOF (in progress) WVDEP (in progress) WVU Potomac Conservancy Canaan Valley Institute Watershed associations
Support large landowners (schools, hospitals) in adopting tree preservation, planting and maintenance policies. Build on CVI's established relationships with schools. Find one large landowner to be a model case for adopting tree policies.	Canaan Valley Institute

5. Emphasize maintenance.

Maintenance is essential for the health of mature and newly-planted trees. Local investment in tree care and awareness has proven successful in maintaining community tree canopy over the long term. There is an anticipated need for additional trained tree care professionals in the state.

Opportunities for action	Who's involved
Continue outreach and education to promote the Tree City USA program, including encouraging municipal investments in tree care and awareness, to support long-term maintenance of tree canopy.	WV DOF
Engage local gardening or forestry groups and clubs (Master Naturalists, Master Gardeners, and Tree Committees) to coordinate with Public Works departments to help with maintenance tasks (mulching, minor pruning, etc).	Public Works Departments Shade Tree Commissions / Tree Boards Master Gardeners Master Naturalists
Expand focus of the Berkeley County green infrastructure workforce development program (Green Collar Jobs Program) from stormwater to urban forestry, to build additional career pathways in tree maintenance and related technical fields.	Canaan Valley Institute (partner in this program) Berkeley County workforce development program (aims to develop career pathways in environmental fields)
Convene leaders of community colleges to explore potential to replicate the Blue Ridge Community and Technical College's successful workforce development program in Environmental Science Technology.	Blue Ridge Community and Technical College Other community colleges
Connect interns from college technical programs (including Blue Ridge Community and Technical College as well as Shepherd University which has two Environmental Science organizations/ honors societies that could be potential partners) with cities who could benefit from students' tree care skills. Investigate state or Bay Program funding opportunities to support this program.	Shepherd University (Mallory Howdysshell POC) Martinsburg (two SU graduates are working with the city as geospatial interns)

