TREE PLANTING IN ABQ

The benefits of trees in an urban landscape extend beyond improvements in air quality and offerings of shade. Trees are a critical component of a sustainable city—they improve community health, safety, energy-usage, and environmental quality, as well as economic, and health benefits to City residents. Intentional, well-planned tree planting efforts help these benefits be fully and equitably experienced by all community members.

Albuquerque's unique ecosystems reinforce the local need to prioritize trees as a community asset. By sequestering carbon, removing pollutants and producing oxygen, trees improve air quality -- creating "carbon sinks". Trees help to decrease stormwater runoff and flooding, and their shade can lower air conditioning bills. Furthermore, trees have been linked to increased feelings of safety, as well as improvements in cognitive and social function.

However, national trends show trees in urban areas can be distributed inequitably, with canopy cover being higher in more socioeconomically privileged communities. "Tree equity" is an increasingly prominent concept, which the City of Portland addressed through a one-year, community-centered project to research local realities of tree distribution. Place-specific research like that of Portland not only raises awareness of issues of tree equity, but it also helps to identify and navigate the unique historic, cultural, environmental and political barriers preventing neighborhoods from increasing their canopy cover.

Albuquerque is already aware of and acting on the local need to improve canopy cover, a need exacerbated by high rates of recent canopy loss. The City of Albuquerque has launched a goal of planting 100,000 trees over the next ten years in tandem with local-non profits such as Tree New Mexico and The Nature Conservancy. One program which reflects this partnership is "NeighborWoods," an effort to "re-tree" Albuquerque neighborhoods while building community by partnering neighborhood volunteers with city experts. The Water Authority also provides "tree-bates" and xeriscape guides for customers to care for and plant water-conserving trees.

Spatial limitations, environmental conditions, and community desires all impact the effectiveness of tree planting work. Specifically for Albuquerque, planting trees in areas most suitable for growth, maintaining current trees and deploying tree species that are suitable to the City's arid, high-desert climate are key considerations. More canopy cover is vital, but achieving this increase depends on tree planting efforts that recognize site-specific needs and community engagement.

Sources* and Recommended Reading:

- The benefits of trees for livable and sustainable communities, Jessica Turner-Skoff and Nicole Cavender, July 2019.
- Growing a more equitable urban forest: Portland's citywide tree planting strategy, Portland Parks & Recreation, February 2018.
- Climate Ready Trees and other ABQ Tree Conservation Resources, The Nature Conservancy
- Albuquerque Community Forest Assessment, Davey Resource Group, December 2014.
- NeighborWoods program aims to rebuild ABQ's thinning tree canopy, Albuquerque Journal, August 2020.

*Full source list easily available upon request.

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