The Chicago Region Trees Initiative reached out to municipalities and park districts to determine the operational capacity of the Chicago Region— that is, how capable are public land managers of maintaining and improving their portions of the urban forest?

We received completed surveys from 132 municipalities and 20 park districts in the seven counties of the Chicago Region—Cook, DuPage, Kane, Kendall, Lake, McHenry, and Will. The following snapshot highlights some of the most important revelations about the challenges, limitations, and realities of public land managers faced in 2014.

Community Information

43% of communities have an active Tree Board or Commission advocating for trees and the urban forest.

Community trees are managed by:

- Arborists/foresters (44%)
- Public Works Director (22%)
- Street superintendent (15%)

96 communities hire permanent, full time forestry staff. In 2014, respondents hired 517 permanent full time, 43 permanent part time, 81 seasonal full time, and 225 seasonal full time forestry positions.

59% of communities have an ISA certified arborist at the helm, but 20% of communities rely on workshops for the education of their head tree management staff.

Policy

97% of respondents reported having at least 1 tree ordinance on the books. The most common ordinances approve and/or prohibit specific tree species (74%), dictate code for tree preservation, protection, or replacement (66%), and address street trees planted in new subdivisions(66%).

Funding

Based on responses to our survey, communities spend on average 1.9% of their annual budgets on urban forestry.

The average urban forestry budget is $6.1 million, but ranges from $0 to $18.9 million.
Tree Management Plans

While 76% of communities have an urban forest management plan, only 57% of those plans are based on a tree inventory!

Tree Inventories

71% of respondents have tree inventories, but of those inventories:

- Only 54% are current
- Only 63% are in a digital format

How often are inventories updated?

- Never (19%)
- As needed (6%)
- Monthly (13%)
- Annually (22%)
- Every 3-5 years (21%)
- Less than every 5 years (10%)

A tree management plan outlines how your community will protect and care for one of its greatest assets---its trees.

Read more on how to get one started for your community at http://www.mortonarb.org/files/Tree%20Tools_Tree%20Management%20Plans.pdf

Management Plans layout steps to address major challenges.

In our survey, respondents reported greatest needs as:

- #1: Additional staff (72%)
- #2: Trees (51%)
- #3: Financial aid / grants (64%)
- #4: Staff training/education (54%)

Storm damage

Although 60% or respondents conduct tree risk/ hazard tree assessments, 55% of respondents reported having major storm damage more than 6 times in the past 10 years!

One of the possible factors is Proactive Tree Maintenance.

18% of communities do not have a regular pruning cycle!

- 6% of communities prune on a 1-2 year cycle
- 39% of communities prune on a 3-5 year cycle
- 33% of communities prune on a 6-10 year cycle
- 4% of communities prune less than every 10 years

Does your community have a plan?
CRTI 2014 Urban Forestry Snapshot

Emerald Ash Borer

Since it was first found in Illinois in 2006, the emerald ash borer has had a devastating impact on the Chicago region’s urban forest, which had a high proportion of ash species.

The total amount spent by 97 communities and park districts in 2014 was $14,747,706. The vast majority of which was spent on contractors, followed distantly by personnel costs.

The average cost per community for EAB programs in 2014 was $131,678.

81% of communities had EAB programs in place in 2014.

What does that mean?

91% have special funds dedicated to tree removal

59% put funds toward public education and outreach

34% applied funds to treatment options

32% developed EAB ordinances

As of 2014, only 3% of respondents had removed more than 90% of their dead ash trees, while 24% still had at least 75% of their ash still standing.

The average amount of ash trees removed in 2014 was 23% of the pre-2006 population.

About 10% of trees were treated to delay affects of EAB.

In 2014, 85,910 trees were removed from 114 communities.

Those communities planted 50,810 trees in replacement.

What factors mattered when they were selecting species to plant?

1. Tolerance of site conditions
2. Diversity of community trees
3. Mature height
4. Required maintenance

What have we learned?

Increasing tree species diversity will create a more resilient urban forest. This goal is especially vital in light of predicted increases of invasive species, such as EAB, due to climate change.