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JOBS & EQUITY *in the* URBAN FOREST

Executive Summary



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Ecotrust is powered by the vision of a world where people and nature thrive together. Since 1991, we have partnered with local communities from California to Alaska to build new ways of living and doing business. From forestry to finance, food access to green building, we work to advance social equity, economic opportunity, and environmental well-being. Together, we are making this place we live a home that we love. Learn more at www.ecotrust.org

PolicyLink

PolicyLink is a national research and action institute advancing economic and social equity by Lifting Up What Works®. For more information, visit PolicyLink.org

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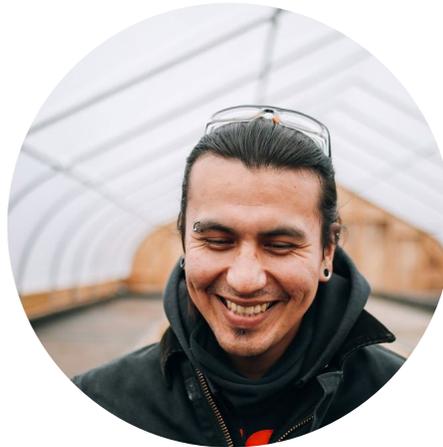
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How can investments in the urban forest be designed to maximize their positive impacts on historically underinvested communities? How can employment programs targeted toward communities of color and low-income communities become more environmentally oriented? And what examples of success to date point the way forward in creating jobs and building social equity in the urban forest?

This study—co-authored by Ecotrust and PolicyLink, with extensive input, review, and data assistance from Verde—examines the economic, ecological, and social impacts of existing community-based urban forestry investments designed to benefit low-income communities of color. Urban forestry and related green infrastructure facilities, including bioswales, rain gardens, and restored open space and natural areas, bring multiple benefits to communities. However, access to these benefits is not equitably distributed. People from lower-income neighborhoods, and communities of color, have less access to green infrastructure and suffer higher levels of toxins in their neighborhoods than do people from higher-income neighborhoods. These communities also have higher rates of long-term unemployment. Is there a way to increase access to the urban forest in low-income communities while also creating living-wage jobs for people facing barriers to employment?

This report documents a growing group of policies, public initiatives, and workforce development programs in urban forestry and related green infrastructure occurring throughout the country; quantifies the economic impact of social impact businesses in urban forestry using Portland-based nonprofit social enterprise Verde Landscape as an example; and provides recommendations on how to maximize equitable outcomes in jobs and business opportunities in the urban forest. We draw on examples from Portland, Philadelphia, New Haven, Buffalo, and the State of California of effective state and local policies, workforce initiatives, and social impact business enterprises to highlight opportunities and best practices for ensuring historically underinvested communities—particularly low-income communities and communities of color—benefit from this growing industry. For example, the State of California’s Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF) granting guidelines contain clear language targeting urban forestry investments toward disadvantaged communities, including tree planting, job creation, and job-training targets. Due in large part to the GGRF’s rigorous guidelines, all urban forestry investments under the fund included benefits to disadvantaged communities.

In this report, we also take a closer look at the barriers and opportunities that members of communities of color and low-income communities face when attempting to enter the fields of urban forestry and green infrastructure, with a focus on the Greater Portland metropolitan area. We find that while significant barriers to employment in these fields persist, there are also clear opportunities for expansion of access to employment and training. For example, while summer-employment programs for youth and young adults are often saturated due to excess demand, targeted outreach and recruitment efforts in communities of color, such as those undertaken by Portland Parks and Recreation, have proved to be effective means of making these programs accessible and inclusive. In the private sector, urban forestry businesses, which are predominantly owned by white males, tend to lack the capacity for targeted outreach and recruitment in communities of color; however, industry-workforce partnerships, such as those developed in Philadelphia as a part of the Green Cities, Clean Waters initiative, have worked to bridge this divide and make private-sector employment in urban forestry fields more inclusive and accessible.



Members of PUSH Blue—a social enterprise based in Buffalo, New York, that actively seeks employees from underrepresented communities.

An important finding in this report is that the majority of the predicted jobs created in urban forestry and green infrastructure do not relate directly to the urban forest itself, in the sense of working directly with plants or soil media. Of the 10 green infrastructure-related occupations with the largest number of projected job openings over the next 10 years in the Portland metropolitan area, the majority are in either transport/material moving (10,515 projected total openings), or construction-related trades (8,178 openings). Jobs that consist of working directly with plants or soil media constitute a small number of projected green infrastructure job openings (3,546 openings). Moreover, plant and soil jobs tend to pay less in wages than jobs in the building or maintenance trades. For instance, the average wage of landscaping and groundskeeping workers is \$15.14, compared to \$18.94 for construction laborers, \$20.66 for maintenance and repair workers, and \$36.58 for plumbers and pipefitters.

Finally, our report finds that green infrastructure is a relatively inexpensive means of job creation, measured in number of jobs per unit of total industry output. In our economic impact (IMPLAN) analysis of Portland-based green infrastructure contractor Verde Landscape, we found that for each \$1 million of direct economic activity generated by the company, 16 direct jobs and 23 total jobs were created in the Greater Portland metropolitan region. This job creation figure compares favorably to most investments in rural watershed restoration throughout Oregon, which yield between five and 13 direct jobs, and between 16 and 24 total jobs, per \$1 million invested. Investments in green infrastructure construction and maintenance also lead to ripple effects throughout the rest of the economy. For instance, for each \$1.00 in output generated directly by Verde Landscape, a total of \$1.88 in output is generated throughout the Greater Portland economy. In other words, every dollar spent on a Verde Landscape project generates almost two dollars of economic activity in Greater Portland.

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Infographic: Economic Multiplier

Economic Impacts

For each \$1.00 in output generated directly by Verde Landscape, a total of \$1.88 in output is generated throughout the Greater Portland economy. In other words, every dollar spent on a Verde project generates almost two dollars of economic activity in Greater Portland.

For each full-time equivalent job generated directly by Verde Landscape, a total of 1.44 jobs are generated throughout the Greater Portland economy.



In conclusion, we find that urban forestry and green infrastructure presents a range of opportunities for communities of color and low-income communities. While the total number of jobs created directly by projects in these areas is not large relative to the size of the economy, the jobs whose functions include some work related to urban forestry and green infrastructure is significant and growing. And while barriers to employment in these fields remain, there are a range of existing interventions, from state-funded urban greening initiatives to cross-sector partnerships for stormwater management, that are making the field of urban forestry more inclusive and accessible to people from historically underinvested communities.

For additional information or insight into this research, please contact us at www.ecotrust.org