

Counting Trees

Ideally, you won't need to count trees yourself. In most communities, someone has already done at least part of the job for you.

Urban Tree Inventories

Municipal urban forestry programs often conduct periodic inventories of trees in their jurisdiction in order to keep up with maintenance and restoration of a valuable public resource. These inventories:

- often cover specific areas;
- identify the number or percentage and sometimes the location of trees at risk;
- sometimes are conducted by volunteer groups at varying levels of detail [including, for example species, general tree health, size, etc.]; and
- may be available on line.

Digging Deeper

The absence of an inventory doesn't mean there are no data available. Most tree crews – municipal staff or contractors – maintain work orders that can offer insight into the amount of wood being “harvested.” Parks departments often keep records of their own tree work.

Tree care companies working on private lands may or may not keep records of each project. If they do, these work orders may list some details about trees removed or remediated. Even anecdotal reports from company officials can help you get a sense of what's out there, and what might be of use.

In cities with significant numbers of abandoned buildings, demolition contractors may track what wood they're pulling out of buildings – and whether it might be available for re-use. Or landfill operators might keep track of the amount and type of wood being dumped.

The municipality itself will sometimes maintain a census of abandoned buildings. A quick tour can give you some insight into the volume and quality of wood that might be recovered.

Urban tree inventories

Inventories on the amount and type of trees in a given area. Inventories are sometimes performed by public agencies as a means to track, understand, or care for a public resource. If a complete tree inventory does not already exist, one may be able to derive at least partial data from:

- Review of work orders performed by tree crews
- Street and park tree inventories
- Forest stand reports
- Wood waste volume inventories
- Inventories on the amount and type of wood debris being dumped, including:

- Landfill reports of incoming material
- Inventories of amount and type of vacant and abandoned buildings:
- Dates of construction
- Square footage of building(s)
- Type(s) of wood used in building construction
- Building condition
- Inventories of locations that receive, process, and make products from urban wood

Inventories often encompass multiple factors. Through Baltimore's recent citywide tree inventory and linked asset management system, scheduled tree removals are easily viewed. Information about location, tree species, size, and condition is linked to the work order for each removal.

Trees that meet certain specifications are flagged as Potential Mill logs. This organizes and streamlines the timber acquisition process and allows preparation for incoming logs and other wood materials.

For more information:

Portland, Oregon uses online data mapping to monitor the growth and health of its urban forest.

<https://www.portlandoregon.gov/parks/article/433143#map>

The Southern Group of State Foresters has compiled a list of guides, software and other resources to help with urban forest inventories.

<https://www.southernforests.org/urban/urban-community-tree-inventories>

Philadelphia's Tree Map not only records existing trees and notes their species and condition; it also identifies potential planting spaces.

<https://www.opentreemap.org/phillytreemap/map/?z=16/40.0083/-75.2897>

Timmons Company, a GIS firm with long experience in urban forestry prepared this free inventory application for mobile use by the Texas Forest Service.

<https://www.timmons.com/news/news-room/free-urban-tree-inventory-app-now-available-on-itunes-and-google-play>