

ALASKA

Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Division of Forestry

In August 2018, the Alaska Department of Natural Resources Division of Forestry (DOF) received an invitation from the Municipality of Anchorage and the University of Alaska to participate in the development of the Anchorage Climate Action Plan (CAP). DOF program staff provided technical assistance to the CAP team in the fall of 2018 as part of the Urban Forest and Watersheds working group. Staff input helped develop overall objectives, numerous action items, and potential project partners for the protection and enhancement of Anchorage's urban forests and watersheds. Some of the recommended actions included hiring a municipal forester through the Anchorage Fire Department, developing an urban forest management plan, regular updates to the Anchorage tree canopy cover, and conducting a priority planting analysis. The Anchorage Climate Action Plan¹ was adopted by the Municipal Assembly on May 21, 2019.

Anchorage's forestlands, waterways, wetlands, and soils are important tools for mitigating the impacts of climate change. These natural assets sequester carbon, improve air quality, provide clean water, and regulate temperatures.

Forests and watersheds provide benefits to residents and visitors of Anchorage, as well as important habitat for Alaska's fish and wildlife. Anchorage is comprised of multiple diverse watersheds that span the land-use gradient from urban to natural.



The urban forest in Anchorage supports diverse wildlife habitat. These three moose are at Fairview Lions Park, just blocks from downtown. Photo Credit: Johanna Grasso

Trees in yards, parks, and shared right of ways make up the urban forest. Trees provide clean air, shade, protection from the elements, habitat, food, and peace of mind. Urban forests and contact with nature have documented benefits to mental health and well-being.

However, the urban forest, and the benefits that come along with a healthy tree canopy, are not evenly distributed throughout Anchorage. Many neighborhoods in Anchorage along the highway corridor have substantially fewer trees and, as a result, do not benefit from the ecosystem services offered by urban forests such as cooling, beautification, increased property values, privacy, wildlife habitat, and sense of place.

these watersheds, connecting neighborhoods, parks, and open spaces. Several Anchorage watersheds support urban salmon runs, a unique feature that benefits residents and attracts visitors.

Many changes to the urban forests and watersheds have already been observed in Anchorage. These changes often have ripple effects throughout the ecosystem with consequences for many species. For example, as the treeline in Anchorage moves up in elevation, it will begin to replace alpine tundra. As this happens, less light is reflected from snow cover and more heat is absorbed, creating a feedback loop that facilitates rapid snowmelt and exacerbates issues associated with changing runoff.

Higher temperatures also contribute to increased wildfire risk. Additionally, changes in climate make forests and waterways more hospitable to invasive species. Invasive species have the potential to compete with and displace native species and impact habitat for wildlife and fish.



Anchorage is a winter city where ice skating at Westchester Lagoon is a popular recreational activity for all ages. Photo Credit: Johanna Grasso

Anchorage watersheds support year-round recreation including running, walking, biking, cross-country skiing, wildlife viewing, and fishing. Many of Anchorage's 250 miles of trails run through



View of the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA) and the Chugach Mountains. UAA is celebrating 11 years as a Tree Campus USA. Photo Credit: © Ken Graham Photography.com

¹ http://www.muni.org/Departments/Mayor/AWARE/ResilientAnchorage/Documents/2019%20Anchorage%20Climate%20Action%20Plan_ADOPTED.pdf

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Community Forestry Program
<http://forestry.alaska.gov/community>