**Draft Scoping Plan Comments: Summary Statement**

**Federal, State, Foundation and Corporate grants and programs should support the training and hiring of urban foresters, municipally trained arborists, grant writers, and job creation at the community level. The State needs to change the emphasis/priorities of the State grants and outreach to support these jobs embedded in urban communities.**

**Details:**

**Chapter 15, Agriculture and Forestry, Page 205, Climate Act Draft Report**

**AF5. Support Local Communities in Forest Protection and Management**

Local governments including counties and municipalities own approximately 1% of forested areas large and productive enough for wood production and have jurisdiction over land use planning and restrictions for forests within their boundaries. 199 In addition, tree canopy covers 1.3 million acres of urban and community areas, storing about 32.1 MMT of carbon (equivalent to the CO2 that is produced to power all the houses in New York for 1½ years) and contribute to 1 million tons gross carbon sequestration each year (equivalent to the CO2 that is produced to power 400,000 homes for 1 year). 200

Increasing forest protection and management in local and urban communities will increase carbon sequestration and storage as well as climate resilience. In addition, trees in urban areas reduce the need for, energy use, and emissions from air conditioning. Current efforts by DEC include the urban and community program, which provides education, outreach, guidance, and a grant program to local and urban communities. **However, there is currently an over reliance on volunteers who have only limited resources and empowerment to achieve long-term change**. An additional community forest conservation grant program is expected to be released in 2022. However, urban and community tree cover is declining by about 6,720 acres annually. 201**. Current planning and engineering solutions for increasing canopy cover need to increase emphasis on ameliorating local weather and the increasing climate impacts of urbanization through managing albedo, heat island enlargement, air movement, and evapotranspiration. Too much emphasis is being placed solely on carbon sequestration. Carbon sequestration is indirectly and substantially impacted by these and other urban conditions.**

In addition, many municipalities lack a comprehensive plan and/or zoning ordinance or laws for forests, and often these documents do not clearly address forest retention and/or uses. In some cases, restrictions within municipal jurisdictions on forest management drive local landowners to develop their land. 202 In addition, due to the costs of maintaining a healthy forest, forest dieback due to pests and diseases, annual taxes, and shifts to smaller parcel sizes, landowners and municipalities have been facing increasing pressures to subdivide, develop or allow development on their forested lands. 203

199 Daniels, Katherine H. 2005. A Municipal Official’s Guide to Forestry in New York State. New York Planning Federation, Department of Environmental Conservation and Empire State Forest Products Association. 31p. Accessed June 9, 2021: <http://cceonondaga.org/resources/municipal-officials-guide-to-forestry-in-new-york-state>.

200 Nowack, David J., Eric J. Greenfield, Robert E. Hoehn, and Elizabeth Lapoint. 2013. Carbon storage and sequestration by trees in urban and community areas of the U.S. Environmental Pollution, 178, 229-236.

201 Nowack, David J., & Greenfield, Eric J., 2018a. Declining urban and community tree cover in the United States. Urban Forestry & Urban Greening, 32, 32-55. 202 Malmsheimer, Robert W. and Donald W. Floyd. 1998. The Right to Practice Forestry: Laws Restricting Nuisance Suits and Municipal Ordinances, Journal of Forestry 96(8): 27-32. https://doi.org/10.1093/jof/96.8.27. 203 Malmsheimer et al. 2008.

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• Provide BMPs: DEC should work with Cornell CALS, and SUNY ESF to provide updated BMP’s for urban forests **and tree planting contracts,** **including what trees to plant for carbon sequestration, air quality, maximum canopy, albedo and heat island affects, air circulation, stormwater reduction as well as climate resilience, and planting and maintenance specifications to increase the lifespan of urban trees to 30 years and older (the point at which most non-forest urban forest street benefits become substantial). Current urban infrastructure requires improved planting, engineering and planning solutions for realizing the long-term benefits of urban trees.**

• Increase funding: The State should increase funding levels and scope of Urban and Community Forestry Grants to assist local municipalities and private landowners in the management of the urban forests, including planning, planting, and maintenance of trees. Round 15 of DEC’s Urban and Community Forest Grants funded 38 projects across the State, however support through this program will **needs to be re-targeted to local job creation with urban forester/municipal arborists part of local municipal management teams to achieve lasting change, with** a greater impact on urban forest carbon benefits.

• Develop guidance and support: DEC and SWCDs should develop guidance for and provide support to local communities to **hire professional urban foresters/trained municipal arborists and** establish or expand youth and young adult conservation corps to employ, and train youth for maintaining and improving urban forest management, creating permanent jobs which require skills **in urban forestry/municipal arboriculture, urban ecology, engineering, budget preparation, grant-writing and GIS/inventory programs.**

Grants have become the key method of targeting communities.  However, without a well prepared and affordable grant writer, the communities that need them the most are shut out.America has  become increasingly addicted to ‘outreach’ and ‘volunteerism.’   It is nice when people can afford to be volunteers, but it does not send a lasting message to the next generation, that their work is valuable and worth pursuing.

In summary**, provide a grant program to fund grant writers who can guide municipalities least able to envision and describe proposals needed to improve areas of  high heat stress , low incomes and low canopy cover.  Grants should go to communities that need the funding the most, not only those that can pay for the best grant writer and get the highest score.**

• Support research: DEC should work with Cornell CALS and SUNY ESF to increase urban forestry and forest carbon research on ways to maximize the carbon and other benefits of establishing and maintaining urban forests**. Applied research addressing the challenges of current urban infrastructure on maintaining safe, healthy and long-lived trees.**

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• Create science-based decision tools: DEC should work with SUNY ESF and Cornell CALS to create science-based decision tools to help make the most efficient and cost-effective decisions on forest-based climate change initiatives **in both forested and urban settings.**

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Components of the Strategy

• Promote forest management: DEC should work with Cornell CALS and SUNY ESF to build public acceptance for forest management and increase the adoption of climate focused forest management on all landownership types.

• Expand outreach: DEC should continue to provide stewardship, cooperating foresters, urban foresters, city planners, and local officials with outreach training, technical assistance, resources, and toolkits to better engage landowners and other stakeholders on climate change. However, preference should be given to establishing expertise **embedded within local municipal management teams for lasting change. Forester-arborists alongside engineers, planners, architects and DPW’s…**

• Support urban forestry: DEC should continue to increase the promotion of urban forestry and tree care through TreeLine USA for utilities, TreeCity USA for communities, Tree Campus for college campuses, and support ReLeaf **efforts (through new programs, e.g. student ambassadors)** in communities across the State.

• Support education and outreach: DEC **should bolster urban forestry and natural resource education and outreach, especially in underserved communities by identifying and working with local partners.**

**DEC should support a comprehensive urban forestry curriculum with the special training outlined below. Targeted urban forestry programs throughout the State have declined since the 1980’s (for example at ESF Syracuse). The availability of programs, wherever they are available, should be publicized by the State. The benefits and expertise provided in these programs, supporting the hiring of urban forestry professionals, would have a substantial impact on urban and environmental justice community residents and perspective students, who are at best marginally aware of the benefits and opportunities these careers can have for them, their neighborhoods, as well as globally. In short, bringing urban forestry/greenspace management to city residents and city planning.**

**DEC should work alongside the US Forest Service and College of Forestry (ESF), Cornell University/Cooperative Extension, Community Colleges and High School STEM programs to create technical programs addressing the needs of municipalities in Urban Forestry/Municipal Arboriculture. These programs need to comprehensively address biology, urban forest management, landscape architecture, urban engineering and materials (hardscape infrastructure), municipal government practices, budgeting and urban ecology and climate impacts.**

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