



NEWS
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**Mississippi Forestry Commission, in Partnership with the Green Infrastructure Center,
Announces Those Communities Participating in the TREES MS Assistance Program**

The Mississippi Forestry Commission (MFC) and the [Green Infrastructure Center, Inc. \(GIC\)](#) have awarded urban forest planning and tree planting support to *six* Mississippi communities through the new **Trees for Restoration, Ecology, Economy, and Society in Mississippi (TREES MS) Assistance Program**. It will be funded from the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) through the [USDA Forest Service](#) and will provide three years of comprehensive technical assistance in these communities. Beginning in 2024, and continuing into 2025, programs will focus on [disadvantaged](#) neighborhoods in the cities of:

- Gulfport
- Laurel
- Natchez

Later, it will expand to:

- Amory
- Kosciusko
- The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians

TREES MS will ensure equitable access to these new trees, as well as to the many benefits healthy trees provide, such as cleaner air and water, cooler summer temperatures, lower utility bills, reduced flooding and erosion, more vibrant economic development, and increased property values. These new trees will also provide vital habitat for wildlife and new leisure and recreational venues for people.

The GIC's Executive Director **Karen Firehock** explained how trees support clean water, stating, "In cities and developed communities, rainfall running over streets carries pollutants and sediment into our rivers, causing pollution, and makes drinking water more expensive to treat. Trees clean that runoff and also reduce flooding."

Taking good care of trees also makes communities safer and more resilient. The GIC's Community Forester **Misty Booth** explained that, "When trees are well maintained, they are less likely to fall or lose a limb during a storm."

The GIC will guide communities participating in the TREES MS Assistance Program through a **stepwise process** to advance local urban and community forestry programs, which will include:

- tree canopy mapping and assessment
- code and ordinance review
- ecosystem services modeling
- the setting of tree canopy goals
- the prioritization of strategies
- community engagement and education
- tree planting on public spaces

Emary Smith, the GIC's Community Forest Planner, will work directly with communities to highlight where trees are desired and will also help them plant those trees. Smith explained that, "Decisions about our urban forests are made every day by homeowners, developers, and community planners, so we need their participation in making plans for how to grow the urban forest."

TREES MS expands the offerings of the [MFC Urban and Community Forestry Program](#), which supports communities in developing sustainable urban forestry programs to enhance the environmental, economic, social, and human health benefits that healthy trees and forests provide. As MFC State Forester **Russell Bozeman** explains, “We are pleased to partner with the GIC to administer the TREES MS Assistance Program and empower Mississippi communities to manage their urban forests to benefit both residents and wildlife.”

Natchez Mayor **Dan Gibson** shares enthusiasm for the collaboration. “The City of Natchez is excited to be selected to participate in the TREES MS Assistance Program,” he said. “The maps, policy review, and recommendations will provide valuable data for our community, which will help us strategically plan where and how to better grow our tree canopy cover. This will also help us better manage our urban forest, particularly for those neighborhoods where our program will have the greatest impact - those areas where we have lack of shade and where storms, drought and disease have taken their toll on our trees.”

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*Founded in 2006, the national Green Infrastructure Center is a nonprofit organization that assists communities in developing strategies for protecting and conserving their ecological and cultural assets. In 2023, **GIC** expanded its reach to include the state of Mississippi and also maintains offices in RI, VA, and SC. The GIC conducts research, land-use planning, and land assessment and mapping to provide the suite of tools needed by communities to protect and restore green assets. For more information visit www.gicinc.org. For more information on **MFC** programs and initiatives, visit www.mfc.ms.gov. Follow MFC on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram (@MSForestryComm) for timely updates.*