



GIC News Release

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For Immediate Release**

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Green Infrastructure Center Expands to Help Reforest Cities

Charlottesville, VA: The nonprofit Green Infrastructure Center has secured several million dollars from the Inflation Reduction Act to hire an additional 12 staff to expand urban tree cover in more than 100 cities and towns over the next three years in VA, RI, SC, GA and MS. The funds were provided to state forestry agencies who have partnered with GIC to help cities expand tree cover to reduce impacts from climate change, provide shade, absorb stormwater, clean the air and support pollinators.

Tree care and coverage is needed now more than ever. National data show urban and suburban tree canopy cover is trending downwards at a rate of about **175,000 acres lost per year** – approximately 36 million trees annually. As these trees are lost, so are the benefits they provide for clean air, water and open space – **an economic loss of \$96 million per year**, according to a 2018 study by Nowak and Greenfield. “Cities are getting hotter too, and less healthful” explained GIC’s executive director and founder Karen Firehock. “Many online climate calculators show how much hotter your city will be in the next few decades and encourage better energy efficiency to reduce our carbon footprint. However, one of the cheapest and easiest ways to reduce climate change impacts and even reverse it, is to start planting trees to capture future carbon emissions. We also should take care of those existing large urban trees storing carbon too,” Firehock added.

GIC is helping cities create maps of their tree canopy cover and then showing them how much pollution the trees clean from the air. This is key for public health. For example, respiratory distress is greater in neighborhoods with low canopy cover and better in well-treed neighborhoods. Firehock explained that, “Trees are especially good at capturing those tiny particles referred to as PM 2.5 (tiny particles of 2.5 microns in size). Those are the particles that lodge deep in a person’s lungs, and over

time, can lead to chronic respiratory diseases such as asthma, which is on the rise in urban areas,” Firehock noted.

One large tree can also soak up thousands of gallons of rainwater runoff every year. In cities, rainfall can carry pollutants such as oil, bacteria from animal waste, and sediment that pollutes our rivers and makes drinking water more expensive to treat too. Trees can help filter and clean up that runoff. When trees are well cared for, they also can buffer communities from wind and other storm damages. Firehock explained that “GIC helps communities ensure that trees are healthy and are resistant to storm damages. This is key to making a city resilient in the face of storms that are increasing in intensity and duration across the United States.”

GIC’s expanded work will focus on disadvantaged communities that are the hottest and most polluted and who lack resources to plant trees on their own. Cities participating in GIC’s new expanded urban programs will receive tree canopy maps, planting goals, documented tree benefits, and tree planting projects. GIC has already worked with cities to turn vacant lots into parks and built an Arboretum at a veteran’s hospital, as well as planting safe walkable routes to schools, and creating resiliency plans for adapting to sea level rise. To learn more about GIC’s programs for connecting habitats, greening cities, or building community resilience, visit the website at <https://gicinc.org/>

Valuing the benefits of the urban forest helps us to better understand the contributions trees provide such as cleaner water and air, shade, stormwater uptake and aesthetic values. According to the GIC’s Director Karen Firehock “Decisions about our urban forests are made every day by homeowners, developers and city planners. Everyone should understand that when we lose trees, we may be increasing flooding, water pollution and poor air quality.” If everyone who reads about this plants one tree, they will be making a difference for their family and even their grandchildren yet to come.

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Founded in 2006, the Green Infrastructure Center is a nonprofit organization with headquarters in Charlottesville, VA that assists communities in developing strategies for protecting and conserving their ecological and cultural assets. 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.https://gicinc.org/](https://gicinc.org/)