

## **Vegetation and Wildlife: Overview**

Disturbance of ecological communities and division into isolated habitats are the major cause for the decline in animal and plant species. Conserving viable ecological habitats in an interconnected system is the most effective way of conserving vegetation and wildlife. Many habitats that are conserved for environmental or scenic reason cannot survive division into small isolated land parcels.

Urban development and other human activity have resulted in a reduction of forested areas and an associated decline in animal and plant populations. Federal, state, and local governments are continually developing and renewing regulations based on best available science to protect remaining animal and plant species. The question of how best to retain wildlife habitat in urban areas is now an issue under discussion in many communities.

## **Functions and Values of Trees and Vegetation: Overview**

Trees and vegetation perform many important functions, including the ability to:

- **Reduce Energy Costs** - Trees have been called the “low tech” solution to energy conservation. Shade from trees reduces the need for air conditioning in summer. In winter, trees break the force of winter winds, lowering heating costs.
- **Clean the Air** - Trees produce oxygen that we breathe. In addition, trees remove air pollution by lowering air temperature, by releasing water into the atmosphere, and by retaining particulates. By reducing the need for heating and cooling systems, trees also reduce emissions that contribute to atmospheric carbon dioxide and the greenhouse effect.
- **Produce Economic Benefits** - Trees add value to retail areas by making them more attractive places for shopping. Trees along streets and on private property increase property values.
- **Screen Noise and Undesirable Views** - Strips of densely planted trees and shrubs will not completely remove the annoyance of city noise, but they can significantly reduce it. Urban forestry researchers have shown that even narrow belts of trees can reduce noise by three to five decibels. Also, trees can provide privacy or screen out undesirable views.
- **Attract Wildlife** - Trees can provide habitat for songbirds and other desirable wildlife, adding natural sounds and beauty in the urban environment.
- **Slow Runoff and Prevent Erosion** - The leaves of trees break the force of rain, reducing flooding by helping water percolate into the soil instead of quickly running off. Tree roots also help hold the soil in place on steeper hillsides, preventing erosion and improving water quality.

Proper management of trees in the community will help to maintain or improve the economic, social, built, and natural environments.