

Project Outline

Scope of Work 4: Addressing Regional Tree Supply Challenges and Opportunities



Background and Program Description

The Chesapeake Bay Trust has been designated to receive federal funds from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as part of the Chesapeake Bay Program (CBP) Goal Implementation Team (GIT) Funding Program. The work to be supported will advance specific outcomes from the 2014 Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement (and the 2022 Amendment) that have been identified as top priorities to address. The funding is supplied by the EPA to University of Florida to complete the project titled “**Scope of Work 4: Addressing Regional Tree Supply Challenges and Opportunities.**”

The goals of “**Scope of Work 4: Addressing Regional Tree Supply Challenges and Opportunities**” are to identify existing market constraints that limit the availability, diversity, and quality of nursery trees for urban plantings in the Chesapeake Bay watershed, and to identify opportunities to create a sustainable, equitable supply of trees for urban use. The project will establish a regional steering committee and host a series of focus groups across the Chesapeake Bay watershed. A virtual forum will be held to highlight the findings of this work and bring industry experts together to discuss the issue.

Rapid Assessment Researchers

Dr. Andrew Koeser, Associate Professor, Environmental Horticulture, University of Florida
Dr. Deborah Hilbert, Research Scientist, Environmental Horticulture, University of Florida
Dr. Dexter Locke, Research Geographer, USDA Forest Service, Baltimore Field Station
Dr. Chris Riley, Research Scientist, Bartlett Tree Research Laboratories/Casey Trees
Dr. Nancy Sonti, Research Ecologist, USDA Forest Service, Baltimore Field Station

Technical Lead

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Project Outline

Overview

Experience, conversations with consumers, searches of inventory lists from nursery websites and databases, and prior research suggest nursery availability as a major limiting factor in being able to purchase and plant the quantity, quality, and diversity of urban trees that consumers desire. One way to begin to address this complex issue is to coordinate conversations between key green industry stakeholder groups. This project utilizes a steering committee, focus group and individual interviews (the “Rapid Assessment”), and a stakeholder forum in order to gain insights into why there is a shortage of trees available for urban plantings, and how key players in this supply chain might approach expanding the supply of quality, diverse, climate-ready trees for use in urban areas in the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

Steering Committee

Objectives

To assist in defining the project’s goals and objectives, provide advice on rapid assessment methodology and study questions, and assist in disseminating findings regarding the supply of trees for use in urban areas in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed (Fig. 1).

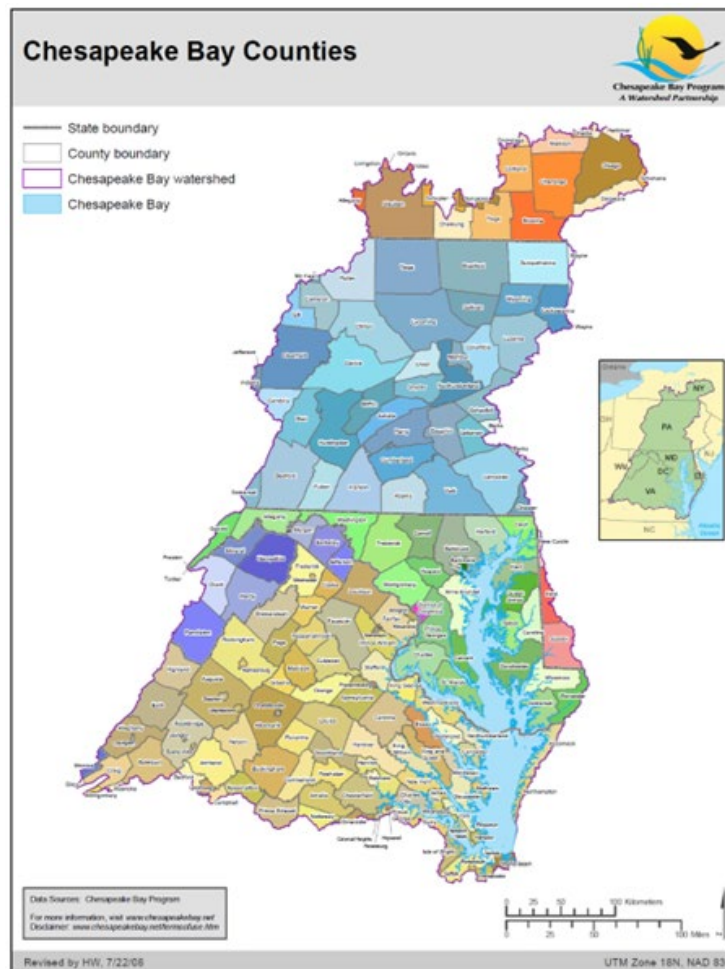


Figure 1. Map of Chesapeake Bay Watershed counties. Source: Chesapeake Bay Program, 2008.

Methods

The steering committee will include approximately 10 members who have leadership roles in the key stakeholder groups: local nursery groups, state nurseries/forestry agencies, NGOs, industry, CBT, university extension, and other key stakeholders. The steering committee will be organized by the assessment researchers with the assistance of CBT and USFS collaborators. The steering committee will meet once at the beginning of the project to review assessment methodology, once after the Rapid Assessment to assist with Forum design, and once at the end of the project.

Outcomes and Outputs

- Three steering committee meetings, approximately 1.5 hours each, to refine goals and objectives, provide advice on rapid assessment methodology, and provide feedback on assessment results and next steps.

Rapid Assessment Part 1: Stakeholder Focus Groups

Objectives

To understand the constraints and opportunities for creating a sustainable supply of quality, diverse, climate-ready tree species for use in urban areas in the Chesapeake Bay watershed (Fig. 1); to understand how workforce development programs and other “green equity” initiatives are related to the urban tree supply pipeline.

Key research questions:

- What factors limit the quantity and quality of trees grown commercially in the region?
- What changes to the current system would allow growers to produce enough climate-ready, underutilized trees to meet consumer demands?
(In the urban forestry context, we define underutilized tree species as those with the potential to thrive in cultivated urban landscapes, in a particular city or region, but are rarely planted.)
- Are there examples of successful tree procurement contracts or other arrangements through which tree supply goals were met?
- What are purchasers willing to do to encourage the production of climate-ready, underutilized trees?
- What tree species or attributes (mature size, function, growth rate, etc.) do participants think are currently underutilized in the region? (i.e., what do they want more of?)

Secondary research questions:

- What informs large-scale purchasers’ decisions to buy certain trees?
- What informs professional consumers’ decisions to use certain trees in their planting plans?
- What informs wholesale growers’ decisions to produce certain trees?
- Are there opportunities to create internships, apprenticeships or other workforce development programs in conjunction with tree procurement efforts?
- Are tree planting initiatives in disadvantaged communities able to find enough climate-ready, diverse trees to meet community demands? What trees do they need more of?

Methods

A series of 3-5 regional focus groups will be held at the beginning of the assessment (continuing until no new information is given – a point known as “saturation”). Each focus group will include 5-9 participants composed of tree producers and purchasers to facilitate cross-industry discussions and better address complexity of this system. Potential focus groups participants will come from stakeholder groups such as the Mid-Atlantic Chapter of the International Society of Arboriculture (MAC-ISA), the Maryland Nursery, Landscape and Greenhouse Association, the Virginia Nursery and Landscape Association, etc.

The steering committee will provide feedback on potential focus group participants. The “snowball sampling” technique will be used as needed for recruitment.

Outcomes and Outputs

- Detailed notes from 3-5 stakeholder focus groups

Rapid Assessment Part 2: Optional Stakeholder Interviews

Objective

To supplement the focus group interviews in providing more information regarding the constraints and opportunities for creating a sustainable supply of quality, diverse, climate-ready tree species for use in urban areas in the Chesapeake Bay watershed (Fig. 1).

Methods

Individual phone and video conference (Zoom) interviews may be conducted on an ad hoc basis. For example, focus group invitees who cannot attend the group meeting may volunteer to discuss the topic one-on-one, or focus group participants may suggest individual stakeholders to contact regarding specific topics that come up during group discussion. Interviews will be 30 minutes, and will be conducted by one of the Rapid Assessment researchers. Questions will include those from the focus groups, as well as more specific questions on topics that require further clarification.

Outcomes and Outputs

- Detailed notes from optional stakeholder interviews

Tree Supply Forum

Objective

To provide an online space for green industry professionals to share information, discuss solutions, and network on the topic of tree supply for urban plantings in the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

Methods

The forum will be a 1-day virtual event hosted by Zoom or a similar online meeting platform. Forum presenters will be selected from a combination of known industry and academic experts, knowledgeable focus group participants, Rapid Assessment researchers, the steering committee, and an open call for presentations. The program will include a keynote, a presentation explaining the Rapid Assessment and wider project, a presentation of the focus group findings, a few presentations on topics identified by the steering committee during Forum planning, and a panel with audience Q&A. Approximately 100 attendees will be invited based on a list compiled by the steering committee and Rapid Assessment team. The organizers will apply for relevant industry continuing education credits to encourage broad professional participation. The University of Florida-Gulf Coast Research and Education Center has a social media and Marketing Coordinator who will assist with the design and creation of high-quality Forum materials (e.g., promotional materials, presentation cover slides, social media infographics, etc.). The forum will be summarized in a report, which will be made available to the public.

Outcomes and Outputs

- 1-day virtual Forum event
- High quality Forum materials that are accessible online to interested stakeholders via GIT Technical Lead/Chesapeake Tree Canopy Network website
- Forum Report

Final Report and Webinar

Objective

To provide a written report and webinar summarizing findings from the rapid assessments and forum and outlining potential solutions and case studies.

Methods

The final report will summarize findings from the focus groups, interviews, forum, and additional feedback from the steering committee. It will also provide case studies of scenarios through which tree supply was met (e.g., contract growing, government-NPO-nursery partnerships, etc.) that can serve as models. It will also provide recommendations to CBT and stakeholders. It will be made available on the CBT website and distributed via the project team's network. A 1-hour webinar will be hosted by CBT and project partners to showcase the project and its findings, provide a Q&A opportunity, and direct attendees to the Final report and additional resources on the topic.

Outcomes and Outputs

- Final project report
- Webinar presentation
- Fact sheet summarizing project and findings