

## **URBAN FOREST STRIKE TEAM (UFST)**

### **Initiative Summary for the Northeast Area, Winter 2016**

The Urban Forest Strike Team (UFST) initiative was developed by the States and U.S. Forest Service in the Southern Region (R8) in 2007, following a series of devastating hurricanes. The initiative involves recruiting, training and deploying professional Urban Foresters and Arborists (required to have specific certification and experience) to assess urban tree storm damage using arboriculture and FEMA standards. The goals of UFST assessments are to assist communities in need, provide increased public safety, a more efficient recovery, reduced loss of the urban tree canopy, and to document disaster recovery needs and costs for possible FEMA reimbursement.

Two person crews generally work along street right of ways and on public properties to identify trees that pose a high risk to the public, and recommend tree removal and treatment needs. GPS systems are used to enter data and identify tree locations. Summary reports and maps are provided to the community to help them plan the work needed and document the cost of the damage (for FEMA or other funding). The UFST crews can help with other optional tasks such as marking trees for removal/pruning, estimating ground debris and identifying reforestation needs.

The Massachusetts Tree Wardens and Foresters Association (MTWFA), through a grant from the U.S. Forest Service, are working with an advisory committee and the States and the U.S. Forest to introduce this technique in the Northeast Area (NA) States. 10 training sessions have been conducted in the Northeast States, over 226 people have gone through the basic Task Specialist training and 9 of those have attended a more advanced Team Leader training. The Southeastern States have over 150 Task Specialists and 36 Team Leaders. Training sessions are usually offered twice a year.

UFST assistance can be provided soon after the disaster, usually during the recovery phase. An UFST contact or Team Leader can work with the State Forester, Urban Forestry Coordinator, Municipal Staff and State Emergency Management staff to assess the need and plan for an UFST deployment. A good fit for an UFST assessment is a disaster situation where there is significant damage to public trees, and the community finds it challenging to determine what trees need removal or pruning. The community should have the capacity to follow up on the UFST recommendations (ideally work is in a federally declared disaster area, and eligible for financial assistance).

UFST deployments can be flexible based on the community needs. Length of deployment is generally one to two weeks. Crew size is up to 13 people and includes a Team Leader and GIS support. Some States are working with their State Emergency Management Agencies to develop awareness of and support for UFST deployments. In the Northeast Area small trial deployments may also be supported under the current grant (most crew expenses are covered, however salaries are not reimbursed). NA UFST Teams have conducted trial deployments in New Hampshire in 2012 and in Massachusetts and Missouri in 2011. The Southern States have done 8 UFST deployments since 2007.

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