

Residents and the Urban Forest

Results Synthesis, 2011-2016

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Project Overview

Between 2011 and 2016, three separate written surveys and in-depth interviews were conducted with residents who live in on-the-ground houses in several neighborhoods across the Greater Toronto Area. The surveys explored attitudes and actions related to municipal policy and property-level trees, including tree planting and removal, species selection, native species, and experiences with the 2013 ice storm. Survey response rates ranged from 36% to 56%. Follow-up interviews were conducted with a sub-set of survey participants, to more deeply explore tree planting, removal and maintenance on individual properties. Below are some of the results from the project to date.

Residential Property Characteristics

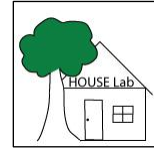
- *Residential land has the highest species richness* of any urban land use type in the Greater Toronto Area, although species evenness is quite low as a few species are dominant and many species are extremely rare.
- *Residential percent canopy cover and stem density* are correlated with available planting space, attitudes towards trees, date of house construction and percent visible minorities in the neighbourhood, while *species richness* is weakly related to household income.

Residents Tree Planting and Removal

- *Residents plant trees primarily for their aesthetic contribution* to their property; they prefer species that are low maintenance, and native species were often described as low maintenance by residents who assumed they would need less watering. Socio-demographic characteristics were not related to tree planting in this study.
- *Residents remove trees primarily because of tree health concerns*, although many trees are also removed because of poor decisions— related to planting location and/or species selected— by the residents. Socio-demographic characteristics were not related to tree removals in this study.

Residents and Native Species

- Most residents *cannot correctly identify the native-status of common urban trees*. Higher knowledge levels were related to previously planting trees and longer residency in their house.
- About 2/3rds of surveyed respondents were *not aware they live in Carolinian Canada*.
- Residents express *generally favourable opinions about native tree species in the urban forest*, but are much less supportive if the native species is associated with higher costs or greater risks.
- 80% of residents surveyed *do not prioritize native species* in their own species selection decisions. About 1/4th *have knowingly planted a native tree* on their property, equal to half of all residents who have planted at least one tree.



Residents and Native Species, Continued

- *Support for native tree species* was greater for participants born in Ontario, those with higher education-levels, and participants who were better able to identify common species native-status.

Residents and Municipal Urban Forest Management

- Of residents surveyed in municipalities with an urban forest management plan, about *half were aware of the plan*. Only 10% had read the plan, 34% *felt there had been no meaningful communication* about the plan by the municipality, and 48% were indifferent to the goals outlined in the plan.
- About two-thirds of survey participants *support their municipality planting more trees* in their neighborhood.
- More than half would like their municipality to *plant more native trees*, but this drops to 1/5th if native species come with additional costs.
- Only *about half of residents surveyed were aware of their municipality's private tree by-law*, while about 1/3rd do not think municipalities should regulated trees on private property. Support for private tree by-laws was related to having planted trees on their property and higher levels of education.
- The majority *support programs to provide low cost trees* for planting on private property and increased municipal planting.

Residents and the December 2013 Ice Storm

- Surveyed six months after the 2013 ice storm, *6% of respondents no longer planned on planting another tree* on their property, while *15% stated they now planned on removing a tree*.
- Some of the trees planned for removal, as well as trees already removed, were healthy, but *now seen as risk during a future ice or wind storm* based on 2013 experiences.

Recommendations

- *Basic information and individualized assistance* is needed to reduce residential tree removals, increase tree plantings, and ensure native species are prioritized.
- *Better outreach and education about municipal urban forestry goals and policies*, including prioritizing native species, is needed.
- Develop *outreach strategies targeting residents new to the region*.
- *Disservices residents experience should be acknowledged*, and strategies to address them identified as these disservices impact residents tree management.

More information: go to <http://sites.utm.utoronto.ca/conway/content/residents-and-urban-forests> for contact information plus a full list of peer-reviewed articles and reports that have details on the specific study areas, data collection and analysis methods, and results outlined here.

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