

## **2025 EWEB Greenpower Grant Proposal**

### **Friends of Trees Eugene-Springfield Neighborhood Canopy Tree Canopy Project**

#### **Organization Background**

##### **Mission**

Friends of Trees inspires people to improve the world around them through a simple solution: Planting Trees. Together.

##### **Needs**

The need for trees in Eugene-Springfield is greater than ever. Climate change is increasing peak summer temperatures, heat island effects, and winter stormwater pulses. Despite perceptions to the contrary, Eugene and Springfield have very low canopy cover. Eugene's canopy cover is about 25% and Springfield's is lower, likely under 20%. In comparison, cities like Atlanta (48%), Pittsburgh (42%), Portland, Oregon (30%), Tallahassee Florida (56%), or Little Rock Arkansas (55%) have much higher canopy cover. Eugene and Springfield could have canopies like these cities, but it would require considerable investment and the planting and care of hundreds of thousands of trees.

Not only does our metro area have low canopy cover, but our tree cover has an inequitable canopy distribution. The south hills of Eugene and Thurston hills of Springfield have high canopy cover (close to 60%), while west Eugene and nearly all of Springfield have low canopy cover (7-20%). The lowest canopy cover in our community is on our school grounds where we need trees for our children's health. In areas along our major arterials with dense development and impervious surfaces, like west 11th or Hwy 99, heat islands form. Heat islands are most dangerous to children and the elderly, who live there at disproportionate rates in apartments, often without air conditioning.

Climate change is causing our communities' trees to become stressed, die, and become prone to pests and diseases. Trees are struggling to establish in our lengthening dry season. Our past history of poor tree and site selection makes it important to choose our trees carefully and site them well, following the mantra of "right tree, right place." Our long history of overemphasizing ornamental trees from summer-rainfall climates, makes our urban canopy vulnerable to pests and pathogens and mortality from summer drought.

Climate change and global commerce exposes our urban forest to risk from introduced pests and diseases. Emerald ash borer is expected to arrive in our community soon, and it is projected to destroy our entire ash tree population, 8-10% of our trees. By overplanting introduced maples we are exposed to risk from summer drought and Asian longhorn beetles.

There is a great need to connect our children with trees and nature, and to have nature at the sites where they live and attend school. Close to 50% of our residents live in rental properties, with a high proportion in apartments; children are disproportionately represented in rental houses and apartments, which tend to have particularly low canopy. Schools have the lowest canopy coverage of any use type in our community. School yards have even lower canopy cover than industrial and commercial areas. This project seeks to continue FOT's work to get more trees in the places that children need them most, including rental properties and school yards.

There is a widespread disconnect from nature and other people locally that has created an epidemic of loneliness. The heart of FOT's programming is to connect people together through planting trees and improving the health of their neighborhoods. Trees are increasingly seen as excellent investments to improve public health as well as environmental health.

We are losing canopy cover in neighborhoods across Eugene and Springfield. The need for trees is greatly felt through each local winter storm and summer drought. FOT programming aims to make tree planting more accessible for community residents. As an organization, we recognize that not everyone has equal access to the benefits of trees and we strive to apply an equity lens to our programming by offering discounted and free trees as well as support for stewardship and tree care. Friends of Trees will focus this project on providing the benefits of trees to underserved residents in Eugene and Springfield.

### **Population Served**

This project seeks to serve all residents of Eugene and Springfield. It is particularly focused on helping people in low canopy areas and underserved areas grow more trees and bring more nature into their lives. Our focus on growing canopy cover on rental properties, school yards, and low canopy areas is meant to provide the benefits of trees to those with the least access to them. Compared to wealthy families, low income families move more often and live more in rentals. Planting more trees at apartments, rental houses, and schools will provide families and children with greater access to the benefits of trees and increased canopy cover.

## **Current Programs and Budget**

Friends of Trees (FOT) is a region-wide organization that works in 120+ neighborhoods in six counties across Oregon and Southwest Washington with offices in Portland and Eugene. Friends of Trees is nationally recognized for its award-winning community forestry programs. The FOT Portland office serves more than 15 cities from Salem north to Vancouver Washington and Clark County Washington. The Portland office has a budget of over three million dollars and more than 25 staff. The Eugene-Springfield office is small in comparison, with one full time and four part time staff with a budget of \$280,000 a year and 3.5 FTE. FOT's two major programs are the neighborhood trees and greenspace programs. Additionally, we have smaller stewardship and educational programs. Community tree planting is expensive but has a high return on investment. The labor costs are higher than the materials costs because of the high time demands of community forestry.

Neighborhood Trees Program - The Neighborhood Trees Program (NT) focuses on increasing our urban canopy cover and engaging the community by planting trees with groups of volunteers in the public right-of-way and in private yards within the city limits of Eugene and Springfield. Street tree planting for this program is largely funded by contracts with the City of Eugene and City of Springfield. Additional funds would enable us to broaden our outreach efforts, fund yard tree plantings, and offer more scholarships to community members who wish to obtain a tree through our NT program but lack the financial means to do so. At this time, our yard tree program is underfunded, primarily supported with past Greenpower grant support. Additional funding for our NT program would allow us to offer discounted or free yard trees and support services to members of our community who would not otherwise have access. Previous Greenpower grant support allowed FOT to offer free trees to anyone who asked in both public and private sites. Key additions to this grant request is greater investment in outreach to owners of rental properties and apartments, and offering free yard planting consultations to potential tree recipients to advise about tree selection and where best to site trees around their homes.

Greenspace Program - FOT's Greenspace Program (GS) emphasizes the importance of restoring our natural areas, particularly those along major highways, rail lines, and bike paths. A typical GS planting will incorporate large, native trees and companion shrubs to provide the most benefits to both the site and the public. As these larger plants become established, we are returning and planting herbaceous plants like native wildflowers that are particularly beneficial to pollinators and butterflies. These plantings result in not only the beautification of these areas, but also provide noise pollution buffering for neighborhoods surrounding these urban and industrial spaces. Additionally, GS plantings provide shelter and food to wildlife and pollinators.

Stewardship - With our strong focus on connecting communities to trees, Friends of Trees also has a variety of stewardship programs. Our Summer Inspector Program engages volunteers and tree recipients in monitoring the success and overall health of previous plantings. Each summer, these volunteer inspectors receive a designated route of trees that they visit and report back on issues or successes to FOT staff. They leave information on how trees are doing and if they are being adequately watered and cared for that is helpful to new tree recipients.

Additionally, our Pruning Program teaches volunteers proper pruning techniques and the importance of early structural pruning for trees in an urban landscape. Through a hands-on approach, small teams of volunteers are led by FOT staff members in proper safety and pruning techniques for establishing young trees.

Friends of Trees also regularly leads “Tree Walks”, a stroll around a designated park or neighborhood wherein a staff member or guest leader teaches attendees tree identification, benefits of trees, local history, and other interesting facts. FOT gives many presentations on tree selection, and a variety of tree topics to neighborhood associations and community groups. These presentations seek to cultivate a sense of environmental stewardship in members of the Eugene and Springfield communities.

Funding for the Neighborhood Tree Canopy Project would directly benefit these underfunded stewardship and education programs that connect community members to their local trees and urban forest.

## **Project Description**

### **Neighborhood Tree Canopy Project**

#### **Statement of the primary purpose**

The focus of this project is to engage members of our local community in tree planting and stewardship, planting trees together at fun community events, growing canopy cover across Eugene and Springfield. This project is particularly focused on planting to increase equity and shade equity for residents of Eugene and Springfield. FOT will use this funding to plant more than 500 additional trees. About one quarter of the trees will be street trees, and the rest will be trees at schools, greenspaces, and in private yards.

Previous Greenpower grant funding supported FOT’s work in Bethel and Far West neighborhoods, as well as low canopy sections of River Road, Friendly, Southeast, Amazon, and Churchill neighborhoods. In Churchill and Southeast, this typically means the lower flat sections of the neighborhoods below the wealthier hills. This grant application will continue work in

these neighborhoods and add a specific focus on Trainsong, Eugene's lowest income and lowest canopy neighborhood, as well as expanding our work in all of Springfield. Previous Greenpower support for FOT helped us build strong relationships with our three local school districts as well as individual schools, their students, parents, teachers and administrators. This project takes this to the next level providing significant plantings that engage students at Springfield, Bethel and 4J schools.

This project is strongly aligned with EWEB's mission and Greenpower grant goals. FOT's work that this grant supports promotes community connection and a commitment to local environmental and public health. The focus areas are in neighborhoods in EWEB's service area with little shade. Improving tree canopy in low canopy areas will reduce energy consumption. Encouraging conifers on the north side of buildings reduces winter heating costs, and deciduous trees on the south and west of homes decrease energy use for summer cooling. Trees are critical green infrastructure that are not equitably distributed. FOT has secured significant funding from multiple sources for this work, and has focused Greenpower grant support for gaps that increase the equity of our work. FOT has leveraged past Greenpower grant support to progressively fill in gaps and improve our work.

Trainsong neighborhood used to be called the Bethel Triangle. It is Eugene's smallest, poorest, and most racially diverse neighborhood. There are few developed streets, with major apartment complexes along Roosevelt Boulevard. The Trainsong neighborhood association has been newly reactivated. FOT intends to partner with this neighborhood group and residents to offer a variety of fruit, nut, native and shade trees for private yards. Staff will support neighbors canvassing homes and apartment complexes, offering free or highly discounted trees and support for species selection and stewardship. Springfield has one of the lowest canopy covers in the state. A high proportion of residents live in rental houses, apartments, and low income housing, sites that have the least trees. We just received a new contract to plant street trees in Springfield. This project will enable us to offer free yard trees to Springfield residents.

Previous Greenpower Grant support helped FOT become more effective at outreach in underserved areas. With a combination of community outreach, mailings and phone calls to property owners, apartment complexes, rentals, and businesses, FOT will engage residents to provide the benefits of trees and stewardship support needed to plant and establish them. Outreach will focus on underserved and low canopy neighborhoods. In Bethel and Far West neighborhoods of west Eugene, we have partnered with neighborhood associations and community and local groups to support door to door canvassing by neighbors with FOT staff nearby to answer questions and support with planting site inspections.

For each of FOT's three previous Greenpower Grants, we have built more varied and stronger relationships with community groups and partners and used this support to improve our

programs. This proposal adds new elements to improve FOT's program services to the community. Each resident will have the opportunity to sign up for a staff member to visit their site to provide free consultation on the best location for trees and the best species selection for their site. This project will enable FOT to offer a variety of fruit- and nut-bearing species as well as native and drought tolerant trees. Stewardship and support will be provided for all community members and residents. Follow up care will include tree care guides and summer tree inspections by volunteers for trees planted in the scope of this project. Additional resources will be provided to all tree recipients through email or mail correspondence.

Over the funding period of the Greenpower grant, FOT will hold more than 10 community tree plantings in low income, low canopy neighborhoods of Eugene and Springfield. Through community engagement, volunteer outreach, and local partnerships, this project will grow canopy cover for residents across Eugene and Springfield.

### **Population Served**

Friends of Trees serves all community members of the Eugene-Springfield metro area. FOT has funding to plant street trees in right-of-ways in Eugene and Springfield. The focus of Greenpower grant funding will be on private yards, schools, and greenspaces in low income and low canopy sections of the metro area.

We offer trees for all neighborhoods and areas of Eugene and Springfield. This grant project is focused on continuing our work in west Eugene neighborhoods including Bethel, Far West, and River Road, and putting special focus on expanding work in Springfield and planting a significant number of trees in Eugene's Trainsong neighborhood.

### **Project Strategies**

For this project, Friends of Trees staff will coordinate tree planting events during the planting season (November through April). Ahead of the planting season, FOT will coordinate outreach, train volunteers, and secure tree orders. Following the planting season, tree recipients will be given support, resources, tree care guides, and monitoring inspections through the summer growing season. Planting and stewardship events will be fulfilled by trained volunteers through FOT programs including tree planting, pruning, monitoring, inspection, education and stewardship support.

FOT has learned a lot in 14 years of working in and with our community through building relationships and partnerships. A key thing we've learned is the need for full life-cycle support, not just tree planting. Full life-cycle support includes outreach, education, tree planting,

stewardship, monitoring, and follow up support. This grant funding would provide more of this support by offering on-site selection and siting advice, more intensive outreach to high rental areas that have few trees, and follow up support.

Strategies to involve community and increase canopy include identifying and supporting neighbors block by block. Involving community members in outreach in their neighborhoods connects neighbors to each other and to the trees planted. By providing materials and education for neighbors to canvas parts of their neighborhoods, FOT staff is then available to evaluate sites and give advice on tree selection on where to place trees for greatest success. Leafleting, door knocking, targeting mailings, neighborhood newsletters, city and utility publications can help reach a broad segment of residents.

Another strategy we are employing is to offer free tree walks and educational presentations that meet at local parks, schools, businesses and community centers that educate about the trees already there, urban forestry best practices, and opportunities to volunteer and obtain trees.

It is particularly challenging to establish trees at schools, which generally have exceptionally low canopy on site. Trees' greatest needs for watering and care are in the summer when schools are often empty. Strategies to get more trees on school sites include building relationships with district administrators, school administrators, grounds maintenance staff, teachers, parents, students, and neighbors living near schools. By engaging active parents and school staff, they will often lead the charge to get and maintain more trees at their schools. FOT can provide support to help make that happen by listening to what the specific school populations needs and desires are and trying to meet them.

Trees are often seen as hazardous, dangerous, or maintenance problems. Trying to address these concerns honestly and directly helps build support for plantings. Being flexible about tree species and selection and finding ways to fit in with existing culture and landscape is also important. Framing trees as tools of engagement, highlighting their public health and benefits to students' ability to learn, and planting trees that can be used in education about cultural history can help bring more people on board. Addressing watering, mowing and maintenance concerns with maintenance staff ahead of time and creating a maintenance plan can help overburdened maintenance staff see trees as less of a challenge.

Another strategy that helps improve interest in trees, particularly at rental properties, is to offer a selection of trees that meet a variety of different needs. Some people prefer trees that require the least maintenance possible; others like native trees, climate resilient trees, trees for food and medicine, or classic ornamental or shade trees. Offering a broad array of options can increase buy-in from people with different concerns or desires.

## **Project Evaluation**

Tree planting can be counted and measured, but trees also have qualitative and hard to describe characteristics and benefits. This project will be evaluated with quantitative data including number of volunteers engaged, trees planted and cared for, and community residents involved. Included in the quantitative analysis will be summer inspector monitoring reports that will detail how well trees are doing during their first few years post planting. Quantitative data will be tracked utilizing FOT's program spreadsheets, ArcGIS application, and Salesforce database.

We will also evaluate the project through qualitative means. This will include volunteer and tree recipient feedback collection. Following events, volunteer and resident feedback will be collected for future improvements to the project. This feedback will focus on event experience, species selection, staff and volunteer support, and quality of education resources.

To gain positive feedback, we begin by asking residents and community members what matters to them and whether there should even be trees. We want every tree to be a wanted tree and the project to have broad community support and involvement. We do not want to increase landlords' burdens nor increase financial or safety risk. For example, in parts of Bethel neighborhood, some residents were extremely concerned about potential sidewalk damage from trees as well as potential leaf drop and safety issues. We addressed this by listening, validating the concerns, and modifying our work in response to the concerns. We avoided planting in some areas, offered smaller stature trees, and moved plantings to private yard sites where neighbors specifically requested them.

## **Project Timeline and Budget**

- Summer 2025
  - Tree nursery orders secured
  - Community outreach: canvassing, tree walks, & tabling at local events.
  - Making connections with neighborhood associations and community groups. Offering to give presentations and address neighborhood concerns.
  - Identifying newsletters, micro-local social media, and other ways to get the word out about tree offerings.
  - Volunteer recruitment



- Planning and coordination of planting season event calendar
- Fall 2025
  - Neighborhood planting program outreach, sign ups, & communication
  - Volunteer recruitment & training
  - Host neighborhood planting events in November-December
- Winter 2025-26
  - Neighborhood planting program outreach, sign ups, & communication
  - Volunteer recruitment & coordination
  - Host neighborhood planting events January-February
- Spring 2026
  - Neighborhood planting program outreach, sign ups, & communication
  - Volunteer recruitment & coordination
  - Host neighborhood planting events March-April
  - Host volunteer and supporter appreciation event
  - Collect event and season feedback
- Summer 2026
  - Tree nursery orders secured
  - Community outreach: canvassing, tree walks, & tabling at local events
  - Volunteer recruitment & training
  - Host stewardship events including Summer Inspector and Pruning volunteer trainings and community events
  - Planning and coordination of planting season event calendar
- Fall 2026
  - Neighborhood planting program outreach, sign ups, & communication
  - Volunteer recruitment & training
  - Host neighborhood planting events in November-December
- Winter 2026-27
  - Neighborhood planting program outreach, sign ups, & communication
  - Volunteer recruitment & coordination
  - Host neighborhood planting events January-February
- Spring 2027
  - Neighborhood planting program outreach, sign ups, & communication
  - Volunteer recruitment & coordination
  - Host neighborhood planting events March-April
  - Host volunteer and supporter appreciation event
  - Collect event and season feedback

- Summer 2027
  - Community outreach: canvassing, tree walks, & local event tabling
  - Volunteer recruitment & training
  - Host stewardship events including Summer Inspector and Pruning volunteer trainings and community events
  - Complete grant report

**Project Budget** (See budget spreadsheet attachment)

This project requests \$50,000 from EWEB to support this work. FOT has a diverse funding stream that includes grants, contracts, individual donations, business donations, and tree fees. EWEB support has leveraged much greater work than could be accomplished with the Greenpower grant funding. We have small and major individual donors who specifically want to fund this project and equity work in urban forestry. Local businesses like Mountain Rose Herbs, Sierra Pacific, International Paper, Eurasian Automotive, Kiva Grocery, Rainbow Valley Design and Construction, Rowell Brokaw Architects provide important support. We have grant funding through one Inflation Reduction Act grant that is specifically to plant in River Road at homes and schools, and another to plant in low income areas of Eugene and Springfield. We are applying for several other grants to expand the work this project sets out to do.