

# TREE AMBASSADOR COMMUNITY ACTION TOOLKIT

LOS ANGELES, CA  
2021 - 2022





# Tree Ambassador Community Action Toolkit



**Your city. Your voice. Your urban forest.  
Tu voz. Tu ciudad. Tu bosque urbano.**



# Tree Ambassador Community Action Toolkit

**Welcome to the Tree Ambassadors Program!  
We're so happy you're here.**

## About this toolkit:

This Community Action Toolkit was written to support community members working toward environmental and social justice through our Tree Ambassador program and to learn from the communities that inspired us to do this work. We hope that by sharing these concepts and engaging in conversations and projects all around the region, our understanding of, ability to work in, and engagement with the diverse communities across Los Angeles will change and grow. As that happens, this toolkit will need to change and grow as well. Please use the toolkit as an aid to help you embark on the work of community building through urban forestry. We invite and welcome other organizations and individuals to adapt this toolkit to empower communities in which they work.

The Tree Ambassador Program is funded by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, CalFire, and the U.S. Forest Service, through City Plants, the Los Angeles Conservation Corps, and Koreatown Youth and Community Center.

Special thanks to California Climate Action Corps fellows Bryce Lewis-Smith, Krystle Yu, and Miles Kim Parr for creating and editing this content. This toolkit was designed by Bryce Lewis-Smith with contributions from Krystle Yu.

**Thanks to all who made and make this program possible.**



**CALIFORNIA CLIMATE  
ACTION CORPS**



**Climate  
Resolve**

**TreePeople**



# Land Acknowledgement

The Tree Ambassador program is a partnership of organizations working across the City of Los Angeles and throughout Southern California. We acknowledge our presence on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of Tovaangar (the Los Angeles basin). The Gabrieleño, Tongva, Chumash, Tataviam, Serreno, Cahuilla, Juaneno, and Luiseno peoples and nations are the traditional land caretakers, and we pay our respects to the Ancestors, Elders, Relatives and Relations past, present and emerging. This land acknowledgement is a small step in recognizing the ways in which we are connected with and responsible for the environmental injustice perpetuated by settler colonialism. As we continue to work and live on this land as settlers and guests, we acknowledge and pledge our commitment to equity and justice for all Indigenous peoples. We encourage our Tree Ambassadors to work in this spirit and to be mindful of our relationship with the land.



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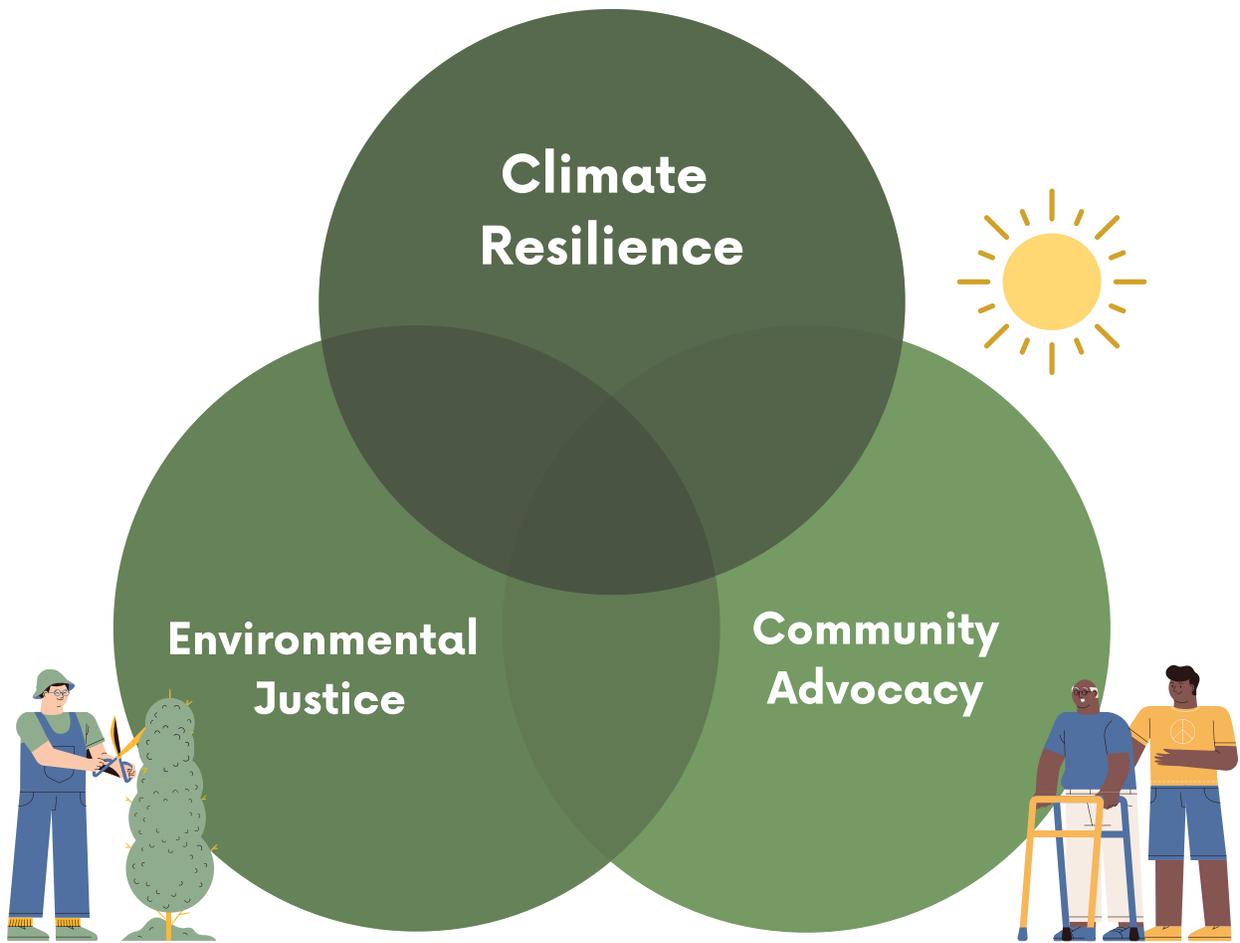
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# Chapter One: The Tree Ambassador Model & Introduction to Urban Forestry







# The Tree Ambassador Model

As a leader in your community, you have been hired to join a group of committed Angelenos who will learn about urban forestry and how trees impact and fit into your neighborhood. The Tree Ambassador program is designed to provide you with on-the-ground, community-centered support. We invite you to learn with us, plant trees with us, and grow a greener future for your corner of the City.

The goal of the Tree Ambassador program is to create a trained group of community members that can build connections with, and amplify the voices of, their communities to achieve key urban greening goals. By attending the training and working closely with urban forestry organizations, you will have the tools, knowledge, and connections needed to make this happen.

# Who is a Tree Ambassador?

**A Tree Ambassador is someone who...**

**A Tree Ambassador is not someone who...**

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Recognizes and communicates needs within their community.</b>     | <b>Already has all the answers.</b>               |
| <b>Brings people together and makes new friends.</b>                 | <b>Already knows everyone in their community.</b> |
| <b>Looks for solutions and does not hesitate to request support.</b> | <b>Can solve any problem on their own.</b>        |
| <b>Sparks interest in others to dream together for the future.</b>   | <b>Does everything by themselves.</b>             |

Neighborhood leadership comes in many forms. But generally, if you see a need in your community you are the right person to be a leader. Leaders see a problem and then find a solution. Leaders come in all shapes and sizes. To be a leader in your neighborhood, you don't have to own a home or be well-connected, all you need is a willingness to participate and invite others along. An effective leader:

- Recognizes and communicates needs within your community
- Has experience serving your community and fostering relationships in your neighborhood
- Is passionate about your community and its future in the face of climate change.
- Is curious and willing to learn about trees in your neighborhood.
- Has interest in the environment, urban greening, climate resilience, and environmental justice
- Brings people together and makes new friends
- Sparks interest in others to dream and take action to grow a greener, healthier, more just future

# What can you expect?

Each of our communities is unique, and each of you will encounter different roadblocks and create innovative solutions while you work with your neighbors to grow a more sustainable Los Angeles. The Tree Ambassador program will provide you with the tools to overcome obstacles to work toward creating climate resilient communities. By the end of this program, together we will have a greater understanding of how to advocate for the wellbeing of each of us, our families, our community members, and future generations.

## 1 Space to share your expertise, learn, & grow

As a member of your community, you hold local knowledge and relationships within your neighborhood. We want to learn from you and give you a space to learn from each other.

## 2 Monthly training sessions, activities & discussions

Online and in-person trainings will be held monthly covering a wide range of issues related to trees and bringing people together in Los Angeles. You will have a chance to practice the things you learn and learn from each other.

## 3 Expert support & advice on how to access resources

For some of our training sessions, we will bring in expert ecologists, community organizers, and city officials as guest speakers. We're here as a resource for you. If any questions or concerns come up throughout your time as a Tree Ambassador, don't hesitate to reach out to us directly.

## 4 Community action toolkit

We created this toolkit to support you in making the greatest impact in your community. We hope you use this toolkit as an aid as you embark on your journey of service to your community.

## 5 Leadership development and professional experience

Connecting with urban greening organizations and other community organizers throughout Los Angeles to build a foundation for your career as an environmentalist and community advocate.

We hope that this experience sparks conversations, plants trees, and empowers our many diverse communities with the agency to effectively and sustainably combat climate change.

# What are the goals of this program?

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- 1 Support your work within your community to raise awareness about the issues of climate change and the impacts of urban heat
- 2 Share how planting and caring for trees is one sustainable solution to urban heat
- 3 Listen to the needs of your community and provide support in response
- 4 Strengthen and cultivate bonds with neighbors, community champions, and the land within your community
- 5 Secure 30 street tree applications from neighbors, community members, and businesses over the 9-month program
- 6 Secure 30 yard tree applications over the 9-month program

**This program will help YOU on your journey as a change-maker and a leader in your community. We are here to support and encourage you.**



Vader-Ade

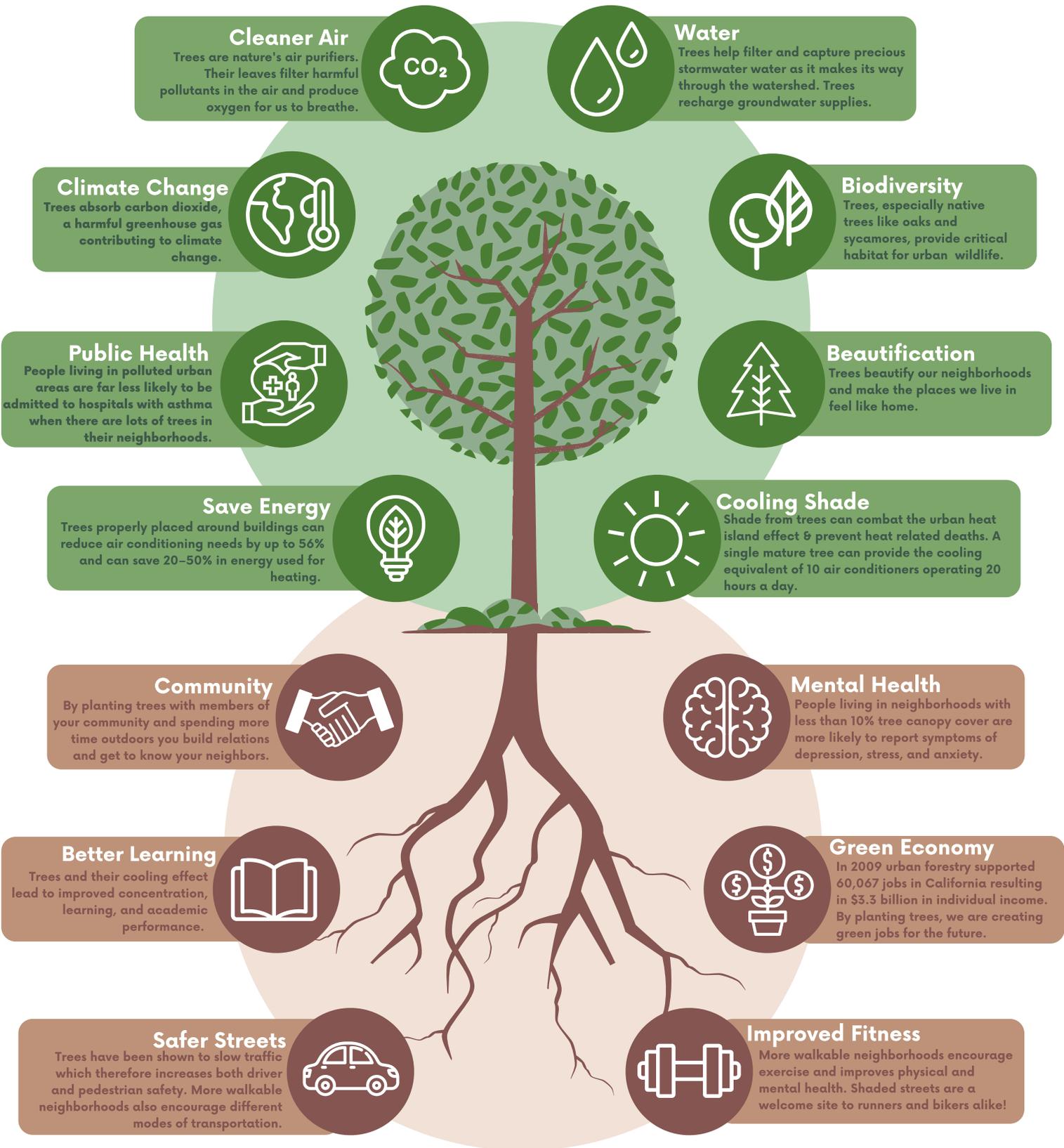
Jordan

Clean Communities

Clean Communities



# DIRECT BENEFITS OF TREES



# INDIRECT BENEFITS OF TREES

# WHY TREES?

“Knowing that you love the earth changes you, activates you to defend and protect and celebrate. But when you feel that the earth loves you in return, that feeling transforms the relationship from a one-way street into a sacred bond.”

Robin Wall Kimmerer

Trees offer many benefits to our communities. They help store carbon dioxide and produce oxygen, combat **climate change**<sup>1</sup>, increase **biodiversity**<sup>2</sup>, and improve public health. Planting and caring for trees are two of many ways we can create a more livable city. Most notably for our cities, urban trees can offset the **urban heat island effect**<sup>3</sup>. Increased temperatures intensify heat waves in cities, which directly increases mortality. Heat-related illness and death have a greater impact on communities of color, the elderly, low to middle income households, and people who are unhoused. Extreme heat can worsen chronic illnesses, such as diabetes and heart and kidney conditions. Trees and other vegetation lower surface and air temperatures through **evapotranspiration**<sup>4</sup> and cooling shade.

Strategically planting shade trees in public spaces and on private property can provide life-saving shelter from heat, reduce energy use, improve air quality, and enhance our overall quality of life. **Your work as a Tree Ambassador will impact the lives of generations to come.**

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**1 Climate Change:** Long-term changes in the average weather patterns that define Earth’s local, regional, and global climates.

**2 Biodiversity:** The variety of life in the world or a particular habitat or ecosystem.

**3 Urban Heat Island Effect:** When an urban area is hotter than the surrounding rural areas. This effect is caused by a lack of trees and by paved surfaces and roads trapping and holding heat from the sun and radiating it back into the air throughout the day and night.

**4 Evapotranspiration:** A process that all plants do where water is transferred from the ground to the atmosphere through evaporation from the soil and by the exhalation of water vapor from plants’ leaves.

# LOS ANGELES'

The urban forest refers to any and all trees within a city and includes many naturally forested areas, most of our urban forest has expanded. This means that we have to continue to plant, care for, and sustain our share.

**Private Property Trees** make up 80 - 90% of Los Angeles' urban forest. These include trees planted in front or backyards on private property. These trees are the responsibility of the property owner or resident. However, the City of Los Angeles does have some rules and regulations that impact removing healthy private property trees. Most notably, the city is trying to protect trees native to the region, which play a major role in California's natural history.



**Street Trees** include trees planted in the public right of way between the sidewalk and the street either in the parkway (planting strip), or a tree well (concrete cut). LA's last

tree inventory in 1996 showed that there were approximately 700,000 trees with more than 900 different species. In 2019 the City began updating the street tree inventory. These trees are managed by the City of Los Angeles' Urban Forestry Division (UFD) within StreetsLA.

# URBAN FOREST

the canopy they create. While Los Angeles' urban forest trees were planted by people as the City developed and grew, we must care for, and manage the trees in our communities in order to maintain a healthy urban forest.

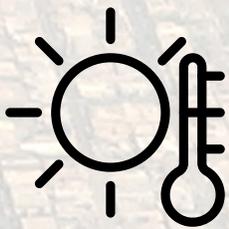
**Parks and Open Space Trees** include trees in parks and open areas, which offer many benefits to people and wildlife alike. As of 2021, there are nearly 140,000 trees in Los Angeles City parks that make up vital green space and cooling centers for Angelenos. These trees are maintained by the Department of Recreation and Parks.



**Median trees** include trees planted on "islands" in between two lanes of traffic. It can be a little confusing who is responsible for these trees. Some are under the care of the UFD, but some are taken care of by the City of Los Angeles' Department of Recreation and Parks (RAP).

Native Trees such as coast live oak, black walnut, and sycamore support local wildlife and encourage biodiversity.

# WHY NOW?



**It's getting hot in here:** Heat is the nation's deadliest weather disaster, killing as many as 12,000 people a year (Shindell 2020). Los Angeles is expected to get hotter and hotter in the coming decades as climate change brings even more intense heat waves. Annually, extreme heat causes more deaths than hurricanes, floods, tornadoes and lightning combined. More than 7,800 official heat-related deaths occurred in the United States from 1999 to 2010.

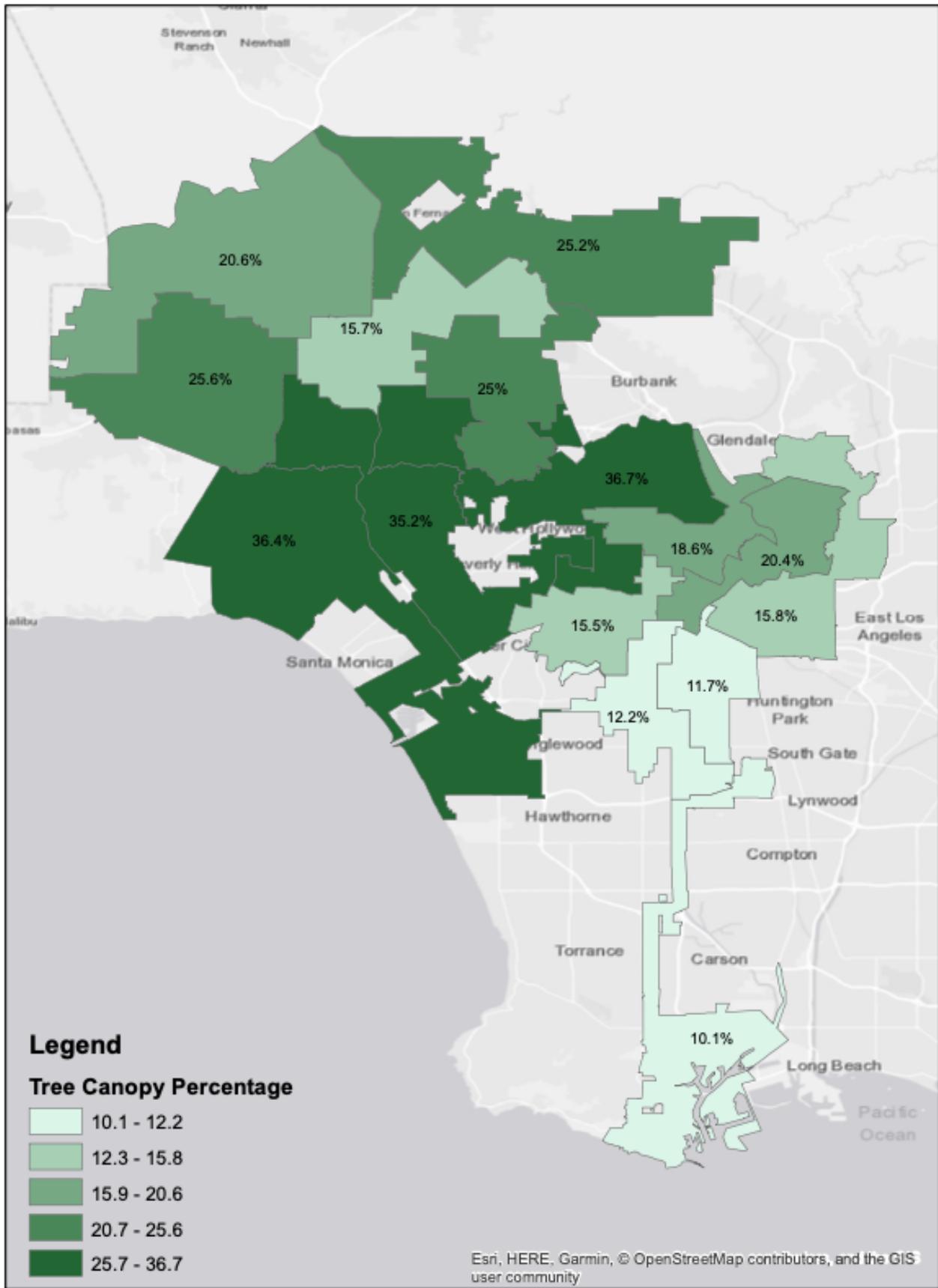


**Trees are under threat:** Our city has lost thousands of trees due to drought, pests, and development. And many more are reaching the end of their life cycles in the coming decades. We are losing trees at a time when we need them the most. The City's Urban Forestry Division estimates our neighborhoods will lose up to 50% of our street trees due to old age in the next 40 years (Sauceda 2015).



**Trees are key** to protecting our communities and combating climate change. We must plant strategically and aggressively now to ensure our communities are equipped with a cooling canopy of healthy, mature trees for future generations.

# Percent Canopy Cover by Council District City of Los Angeles



Data from TreePeople and Center for Urban Resilience at Loyola Marymount University,  
Image created by Michelle Barton







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