

# TACKLING EXTREME HEAT THROUGH CONGRESSIONAL ACTION AND INVESTMENTS IN TREE EQUITY

## EXTREME HEAT COSTS LIVES

Extreme heat events continue to worsen across the country. The CDC reports that **more than 1,200 people die as a result of extreme heat every year**. In 2023, 645 people in Maricopa County, AZ alone died from heat-related illness. These extreme heat events are exacerbated by the lack of Tree Equity, in underserved communities across the country, providing less natural protection across racial and financial barriers. **Communities of color on average have 38 percent less tree cover** and are almost 13°F hotter than white communities, and lower income neighborhoods have 26 percent less cover and are almost 6°F hotter than wealthier ones.

These extreme heat impacts also span sectors, such as creating barriers to access for outdoor recreation and public transit, and increasing energy costs for consumers in lower-income communities and communities of color. Recognizing these impacts, American Forests views it as critical that extreme heat is treated as a cross-sector issue, where inputs from the public health, land use and transportation sectors can help address extreme heat and its effects within these sectors.

## TREE EQUITY ADDRESSES EXTREME HEAT

Achieving Tree Equity in underserved areas will literally save lives, and improve the wellbeing of local communities. American Forests has built partnerships with cities, organizations, and federal agencies to utilize REPLANT Act, Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act funds to implement science-smart Tree Equity policies that ensure there are enough trees in every part of every city, creating tens of thousands of jobs in the process.

**The USDA has invested \$1.5 billion to expand access to trees in communities in every state.**

However, more funds are needed to ensure that public-private partnerships can continue to thrive and achieve their goals of planting millions of trees across the country.

There are partners ready and able to implement Tree Equity solutions to extreme heat. For example, **American Forests, GreenLatinos and Groundwork USA have joined forces to create the Tree Equity Alliance**, which will be a unified voice in building the case for Tree Equity as a critical way of advancing diverse community benefits .



Learn more about the impact of extreme heat on communities across the country



## TAKE ACTION

Addressing the disparate impacts of extreme heat requires additional congressional action and investment in Tree Equity. The following policy recommendations would make a meaningful difference in addressing extreme heat in our most vulnerable communities while treating the issue with the urgency that it demands.



**Mitigate extreme heat through comprehensive legislation that invests in trees and empowers a whole-of-government approach to protecting communities. Existing policy proposals that make an effort in this direction include:**

- **Stay Cool Act (HR 4314)**- Creates grant programs to develop and improve tree canopy and high quality green spaces, to construct cooling features, to check in on seniors during extreme heat events, and for community resilience and cooling centers. Directs relevant agencies to study, report, and address impacts of extreme heat to save lives.
- **Saving Hazardous and Declining Environments Act (SHADE Act) (HR 4817)**- Creates a grant program at U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to plant trees in formerly redlined and low-income areas.
- **Trees for Residential Energy and Economic Savings Act (TREES ACT) (HR 6348)**- Bipartisan bill creates a cost-share grant program at the U.S. Department of Energy to help homeowners lower energy costs, increase tree canopy in underserved communities, and help mitigate the effects of climate change through residential tree planting.
- **Excess Urban Heat Mitigation Act (HR 2945)**- Creates grant programs for the implementation, construction, or maintenance of tree planting, green roofs, shade structures, cooling centers, and community gardens, as well as outreach to the community and education efforts.
- **Preventing HEAT Illness and Deaths Act (HR 4953)**- Creates a community heat resilience program within the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the National Integrated Heat Health Information System (NIHHIS) Interagency Committee. The program would provide financial assistance for urban forestry and other community projects that reduce exposure to extreme heat.

**Continue increased investment in the USDA Forest Service's Urban and Community Forestry program (U&CF)**

- In September of 2023, utilizing funds from the Inflation Reduction Act, the USDA Forest Service awarded **more than \$1 billion in competitive grants** to plant and maintain trees, combat extreme heat and climate change, and improve access to nature in cities, towns, and suburbs where more than 84% of Americans live, work, and play.
- Despite this historic funding, communities across the country need more support in protecting their residents from the growing threat of extreme heat. **The demand for the IRA awards was over 6 times the available funding.**
- Congress must prioritize funding of community led urban forestry investments at a substantially more robust level than the average annual appropriation of \$35 to \$40 million as a strong step toward addressing extreme heat.



Find more information and resources at  
American Forests' Extreme Heat  
Resources Hub

