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Las Vegas to harness post-fire floodwaters to grow urban forest
Green stormwater infrastructure, climate-ready trees among steps in 25-year roadmap

LAS VEGAS – Four years out from the Hermit’s Peak-Calf Canyon Fire, the largest wildfire in state history, the City of Las Vegas has mapped a path forward to turn the risk of post-fire flooding into an asset to restore the city’s urban forests and green spaces.

The [Las Vegas Urban Forestry Management Plan](#), adopted in June, charts a 25-year roadmap to deploy green stormwater infrastructure, plant trees selected for a changing climate, and enhance parks and corridors to reduce post-fire impacts and foster a healthier, drought resilient urban forest.

“New Mexico is taking a proactive approach to mitigate the impacts of wildfire and climate change,” said **State Forester Laura McCarthy**. “We learned difficult lessons with the Hermit’s Peak-Calf Canyon Fire. Now is the time for us to anticipate vulnerabilities and get ahead of them.”

Severe flooding devastated Las Vegas in the wake of 2022’s Hermit’s Peak-Calf Canyon Fire, washing out homes, roads and acequias. Post-fire runoff inundated the water treatment plant with silt and ash, leaving residents without a clean water supply. The city’s floodplain, which includes large portions of the downtown area, has ballooned by more than 60 acres.

In response, the city developed an Urban Forestry Management Plan that will both mitigate floods and reinvigorate green spaces using green stormwater infrastructure. Rain gardens and curb cuts will channel runoff to trees and green spaces, harnessing once-dangerous floods to grow the city’s urban forest. By capturing and filtering runoff, green stormwater infrastructure will reduce strain on the municipal water system and recharge the aquifer.

Amid New Mexico’s prolonged drought, these solutions will conserve every available drop: In a standard one-tenth inch rain event, the city’s impervious surfaces like roads and buildings could harness up to 3.23 million gallons of water.

“These stormwater solutions return water to its rightful place: a precious resource that sustains our communities rather than a post-fire risk that threatens this city,” said **Kristen Sanders**, Las Vegas urban and community forester with the Forestry Division. “This plan is a roadmap for both post-fire recovery and climate adaptation. By using green stormwater infrastructure and smart urban forestry practices, Las Vegas can chart a sustainable future.”

This innovative work will sustain Las Vegas’ urban trees, which are crucial for well-being. They create cooling shade and purify air, influence where people gather and create healthier communities. The city’s aging trees have steadily declined in health, and invasive Siberian elms have proliferated.

Las Vegas aims to grow its urban canopy, not just sustain it, by diversifying the canopy with natives, planting 70 [climate-ready trees](#) each year and caring for trees properly. The plan’s additional recommendations for parks, trails, corridors and land bridges will enable the city to better connect its urban forest to the surrounding mountains, meadows and grassland.

“Our urban forest is one of Las Vegas’ greatest natural assets, but many trees that have shaded our neighborhoods for generations are reaching the end of their lives,” said **Las Vegas Mayor David Romero**. “This plan provides a roadmap to renew that legacy. By planting climate-ready trees and using innovative storm water solutions, we will create cooler neighborhoods, cleaner air, stronger flood protection, and a greener, healthier, more resilient Las Vegas for future generations.”

View the [Las Vegas Urban Forestry Management Plan](#) and learn more about our [urban and community forestry program](#).

This press release is available online [here](#).



Volunteers plant a tree in Las Vegas to honor Arbor Day. Photo by Adam Wisely.



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