

5.0 Tree Removal, Replacement and Planting

Introduction

Trees in City parks are components of an ecosystem undergoing dynamic physiological processes. These trees like any others grow, develop, may become diseased and decayed, and die. To manage a sustainable urban forest a methodology must be in place to direct us when trees need to be removed, when it is necessary to replace them, and how to prolong the longevity of an urban forest as a whole, through reforestation with young, diverse, and appropriately located tree species.

5.10 Tree Removal

Trees in city parks are removed for the following reasons: the tree (s) is dead or dying, it is diseased, it is damaged or injured to the extent that is likely to die or become diseased, or it constitutes a hazard. Furthermore, its removal should enhance the health of remaining trees within the immediate vicinity and be consistent with good forestry practices.

Nuisance trees are also removed when any part of the tree (s) causes or is about to cause impairment of city operations (including recreation) or damage to buildings, hardscape, or permanent infrastructure lines that cannot be relocated, and in the opinion of the DRP Arborist, pruning will too severely compromise the tree's structure.

Proposed capital improvement projects that recommend tree (s) removal must have consensus of the community. Participants must agree to the removal of all trees specified in a project before the project proceeds to the next phase.

5.10.1 DRP Tree Removal Procedure

The procedures outlined in Appendix J must be followed when trees are removed. Disciplinary action may apply to DRP staff if these procedures are not precisely followed.

5.10.2 Notification Protocol for Large Scale Tree Removal Projects

When a large number of trees have been approved for removal the Notification Protocol must be followed before the project begins (Appendix K). The protocol assures that information is communicated to the public, City council offices, the Park Advisory Board, and to the department Divisions affected by the removal project. This protocol provides an opportunity for the public to become involved with forestry issues and for good department coordination.

5.10.3 Tree Removal—Four Categories of DRP Protected Trees

A) Trees Protected by LA City Ordinances must always have permit and an approval by the Board of Public Works before any alteration to the trees is made. The only exception is if the tree poses an immediate threat to life or public safety. The DRP Forestry Staff has the discretion to conduct emergency tree removal. Documentation (including digital photos) shall follow after the hazard has been mitigated. The request for the removal of a tree in this category must begin with the DRP Forestry Division.

B) Heritage Trees must follow the DRP Tree Removal Procedure before any alteration to the trees is made. Furthermore, the General Manager of DRP or his/her designee must approve the removal recommendation before any action is taken. The only exception is if the tree poses an immediate threat to life or public safety. The Forestry Staff has the discretion to conduct emergency tree removal. Documentation (including digital photos) shall follow after the hazard has been mitigated. A record of the event will be entered to the designated Heritage Trees list.

C) Special Habitat Value Trees must follow the DRP Tree Removal Procedure before any alteration is made to them. Additionally, the General Manager of DRP or his/her designee must approve the removal before any action is taken. The only exception is if the tree poses an immediate threat to life or public safety. The Forestry Staff has the discretion to conduct emergency tree removal. Documentation (including digital photos) shall follow after the hazard has been mitigated. A record of removed tree(s) will be entered to the Forestry Work Order System.

D) Common Park Trees: The removal of any park tree is not permitted without approval. If the tree is not a Tree Protected by the LA Ordinance or DRP Tree Preservation Policy (Appendix A) as a Heritage Tree or Special Habitat Value Tree, the DRP Tree Removal Procedure takes precedence.

5.20 Tree Replacement

Tree replacement is guided by the Los Angeles City Landscape Policy (Appendix M) and by the objectives and functions as defined by the Recreation & Parks Department. DRP trees are planted according to the DRP Reforestation Program. Sometimes when crowding or other physical constraints make it impossible to plant the same tree in the same place where it was removed, an alternate location is found. Undesirable tree species are not replaced.

5.30 Tree Planting

The role of the urban forest is to improve environmental quality and increase the economic, physical, and social health of communities. As communities continue to grow urban forests will become even more important to the quality of life.

“A Society grows great when old men plant trees whose shade they know they shall never sit in” – Greek Proverb

Part of sound urban forest management is to plant desirable, sustainable trees in the urban environment. The ideal park tree is a shade tree with minimum susceptibility to wind damage and branch drop, does not require frequent pruning, produces slight litter, is deep-rooted, has few serious pest and disease problems, and tolerates a wide range of soil conditions, irrigation regimes, and air pollutants. Since relatively few trees have all these traits, it is important to match the tree species to the planting site by determining what issues are most important on a case-by-case basis.

5.30.1 DRP Reforestation Program

The Program represents a general evaluation of tree canopy in each of the City parks with respect to age class, tree size, and variety of evergreen, deciduous, coniferous trees. The program calls for the gradual planting of trees at each park facility in the coming decade. The DRP Reforestation Program is available in the Forestry Division and in each Region Headquarter office.

5.30.2 Planting Guidelines for Park Trees

Recreation and Parks Tree Planting and Selection Guidelines (Appendix N) are guidelines to assist staff in making the best possible match of tree species to a specific location. They provide a starting point for species selection and are not intended to be limiting.

Our Department guidelines include priorities for native habitat restoration or enhancement, prevention from large canopy losses caused by pest epidemics, and geographic consideration for species selection.

5.30.3 Nursery Specification for Park Trees

Specifications for purchase of trees by the DRP Department call for high quality, healthy plant stock. Healthy and vigorous park trees begin with plants that meet the specifications outlined in Appendix O. DRP staff may refuse plants that do not meet the specification with any cost for replacement.