

U.S. Natural Climate Solutions Accelerator Finalist: Travis County Floodplain Reforestation Program.

Collaborative effort between TreeFolks, the City of Austin's Sustainability Office and Watershed Protection Department, Travis County, and City Forest Credits.

Travis County Floodplain Reforestation Program works to restore riparian buffers by reforesting near stream areas in proximity to urban centers, and to generate Carbon+ credits for sale to cities and local companies. Replanting helps to restore degraded banks and wildlife habitat, enhances downstream water quality and quantity, and bolsters resilience in the face of anticipated stressors of urbanization and climate change. Carbon+ credits are planned to be generated from public land plantings in conjunction with private landowners who elect to participate in reforestation. This aims to improve connectivity and to demonstrate feasibility of generating credits to secure long-term sustainable funding for replanting.

- **Carbon+ credits** are quantified using a unique method developed by scientists at City Forest Credits 501(c)3. This method accounts for the particular environmental variables of riparian plantings, and includes additional benefits of quantified rainfall interception, energy savings, and air quality improvements.
- **Riparian reforestation:** The initiative has found that reforesting riparian areas through sapling plantings is the most cost-effective method of establishing forestland at scale. The methodology yields healthy forest density by overplanting low-cost (\$1-\$1.50) native tree saplings at high density (8x10 foot spacing) to offset mortality. Lack of irrigation and fencing needs, or other interventions helps to keep the costs low. Landowners are not expected to actively maintain the saplings once planted, and are offered free educational consultations to increase understanding of the importance of healthy, riparian forests, with follow-up tree survival studies.
- **How it works:** Watershed Protection Department of the City of Austin contributed an analysis of potential areas to target for reforesting riparian greenbelts in eastern Travis County. Based on this analysis TreeFolks select high priority public land parcels, and conduct community outreach to recruit applications from adjacent private landowners for reforestation services. Local volunteers and youth service organizations such as AmeriCorps are engaged in replanting, in addition to some contracted planting. Carbon+ credits generated from these activities are offered for sale to established buyers like the City of Austin and companies interested to buy locally sourced offset credits to meet their carbon reduction goals, while keeping taxpayer dollars in the local economy and delivering local environmental benefits. Sale of Carbon+ credits yields funding for additional urban forestry projects.
- **Scaling up:** This approach aims to develop a mechanism for large-scale urban forestry projects on public and private lands nationwide. Beyond replication across Texas, riparian plantings can benefit any areas experiencing rapid urbanization and anticipating climatic stressors of more severe storms, changes in rainfall patterns, and longer draughts. In addition, the initiative foresees application of this approach to help control run-off in areas like the Chesapeake Bay and to promote salmon habitat in the Northwest.

The initiative aims to demonstrate that it is possible to effectively sequester significant amounts of carbon through riparian reforestation and to provide mitigation of associated impacts from climate change, while delivering long-term carbon offsets and utilizing them as an additional source of funding for tree planting.