

## Briefing Document

# Engaging a Spectrum of Collaborative Leadership: Valuing Kentucky's Urban Forests

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### **Making Our Communities Better**

Throughout Northern Kentucky communities are looking for strategies to better manage higher density neighborhoods, increasing transportation patterns, and the conditions caused by sprawl. Green infrastructure, the connection of natural spaces to benefit the places where people live work and play – this important natural resource is under pressure and may be at risk. NKUCFC is encouraging a collaborative network of key stakeholders and organizations to share innovative ideas, integrate other “smart growth” initiatives, and prioritize the importance of urban forests to livable communities. This is just the beginning.

### **Benefits of Natural Resources: What You Should Know**

Kentucky's urban and rural forests have essentially been ignored. Their current location and condition is basically a result of indifference rather than planning and management. These natural resources can deliver a variety of benefits. They enhance livable communities with better air and water quality, reducing storm water runoff, improving land stability and soil erosion, wildlife and habitat diversity, and overall aesthetic quality. The NKUCFC has completed county wide forest canopy studies for Boone, Campbell and Kenton Counties. The Campbell County report will be released in early Fall. These studies map and evaluate the quality of the forest-based tree size. They show 30 to 40% of the counties are forested, but only 2 to 4% of the forests are high quality and capable of delivering maximum benefits. The studies also provide information about location of forests, enabling a determination of where forests could be most effective.

**Why worry?** As we look for resources to develop the 2015 Livable Communities Plan, it will require greater knowledge of our natural spaces and how they can best support our economic growth. The forest canopy data can be a useful tool to develop plans for enhancing our natural spaces.

### **Working Together, Building Livable Communities**

Addressing these issues is a big job. The purpose of creating a collaborative framework and this briefing document is to encourage informed discussion, identify opportunities to maximize planning efforts, and achieve measurable outcomes. NKUCFC has identified five priority areas:

1. Communities value trees and green spaces.
2. Forests are an important part of our primary natural systems – hillside greenbelts and stream corridors.
3. NKUCFC can assist in expanding a regional reforestation effort on a grand scale with a focus on:
  - Enhancing our natural systems
  - Our interstate corridors
  - Urban neighborhoods and parks
4. NKUCFC can provide expanded expert urban forestry information about the benefits of our urban forests.
5. Support implementation of a **ground-breaking Regional Park Plan and Regional Green Infrastructure Plan** with forest canopy inventories, grant programs and greater awareness of the value of urban forest.