

## Urban & Community Disaster Response

A Project of the Southern Group of State Foresters

### Overview:

A disaster response pilot project initiated by the U&CF programs in Virginia and North Carolina is being tested at a regional scale by the Southern Group of State Foresters. Urban Forest Strike Teams (UFST) are composed of state forestry agency certified arborists trained to make urban tree damage assessments following natural disasters.

The primary objective of this project and these teams is to develop an in-state and regional capacity to respond to disasters by providing effective, practical, and comprehensive urban tree assessment training to state agency arborists.

During January and February (2008), UFST task specialists responded to assist Oklahoma communities affected by the December 2007 ice storm. Three teams each spent a week in Oklahoma for this response in Tulsa, Bixby, and Nichols Hills.

In September and October (2008), UFST team leaders and task specialists responded to Hurricane Gustav in Baton Rouge, LA. Two teams spent 10 days each assisting with tree assessments along city streets and in parks.

### Value to Communities:

Communities benefit at several levels:

- Assistance can be provided to communities that lack professional capacity or expertise
- Trained, experienced, Certified Arborists assist communities with decisions that affect public safety and the long-term viability of their urban forest
- Tree management information is obtained in a timely manner for response & recovery
- Assistance is provided at the stage of disaster response most appropriate for the community
- Assessments can be used in-house or with contractors to facilitate debris removal and reimbursement with FEMA

### Types of Assessments:

The UFSTs can provide post-disaster tree assessments to help urban and wildland-urban interface communities respond and/or recover from natural disasters.

- **Estimates of tree debris:** Teams are qualified to make on the ground measurements and estimates of tree debris volume for removal during the initial or a prolonged response period. The techniques include sampling, but also rely heavily on the arborists' experience to quickly determine a damaged trees status (i.e. keep or remove). Volume estimates of tree debris are collected for a sample of street segments within the disaster area and are identified by block, and street. The *Storm Damage Assessment Protocol (SDAP)* has been adapted for this assessment. The objective of this assessment is to provide communities with reliable estimates for short-term planning and response.
- **Risk assessment of public trees:** This assessment sends trained teams into the disaster area following a community's initial response for safety and restoration of basic utilities. Teams quickly, but thoroughly evaluate public trees to determine the extent of public risk. Individual trees are designated for removal or pruning to eliminate risk to the public. The trees are spatially identified so that contractors or municipal staff can easily relocate the tree for the recommended action. The objective of this assessment is to reduce the loss of additional trees during the response phase of the disaster. In addition to risk, this assessment can also include the measurement of debris volume for the community's contract discussions with FEMA for debris reimbursement.