

Establishing an Urban Micro-Forest & Prairie at UWT

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As global climate shifts, urban areas without green spaces are disproportionately impacted by climatic shifts due to a lack of environmental services such as tree canopy coverage and water permeability. Tacoma, Washington is particularly affected as it has the lowest canopy coverage of any city in the Puget Sound region. For residents of Tacoma this means increased average temperatures and life-threatening temperatures during high heat events. This project aims to increase Tacoma's tree canopy by densely planting a heavily trafficked public space in downtown Tacoma, in an area of the city which currently has one of the lowest canopy coverage rates in the city. This intervention provides a range of additional environmental, public, and aesthetic benefits to the city. Our 1200 square foot Micro-Forest and Prairie site has been mapped out into respective zones that address cultural, ecosystem, and scientific concerns in demonstration of the ways these are interrelated, and will be populated with young plants of various native species. Over time we will continue planting in phases while supporting young species until they establish themselves and maintenance will reduce drastically. As of spring 2026, we have completed one planting phase of both forest and prairie ecosystems and will complete the rest over the next few years. This will restore lost historic biodiversity to Tacoma and provide a number of environmental services, while creating a more climate resilient space for students to utilize on campus which could be replicated in similar universities and urban spaces around the world.