

A Report on Roanoke County's Existing and Possible Urban Tree Canopy

Project Background

The analysis of Roanoke County's urban tree canopy (UTC) was carried out by the Virginia Department of Forestry in collaboration with Roanoke County and the Roanoke Valley—Alleghany Regional Commission. Assistance was provided by the Virginia Geospatial Extension Program (VGEP) at Virginia Tech's Department of Forestry and by the Spatial Analysis Laboratory (SAL) of the University of Vermont.

The goal of the project was to apply the USDA Forest Service's UTC assessment protocols to Roanoke County. This analysis was conducted based on year 2008 data.

Why is Tree Canopy Important?

Urban tree canopy (UTC) is the layer of leaves, branches, and stems of trees that cover the ground when viewed from above. Urban tree canopy provides many benefits to communities including improving water quality, conserving energy, lowering county temperatures, reducing air pollution, enhancing property values, providing wildlife habitat, facilitating social and educational opportunities, and providing aesthetic benefits.

Key Terms

UTC: Urban tree canopy (UTC) is the layer of leaves, branches, and stems of trees that cover the ground when viewed from above.

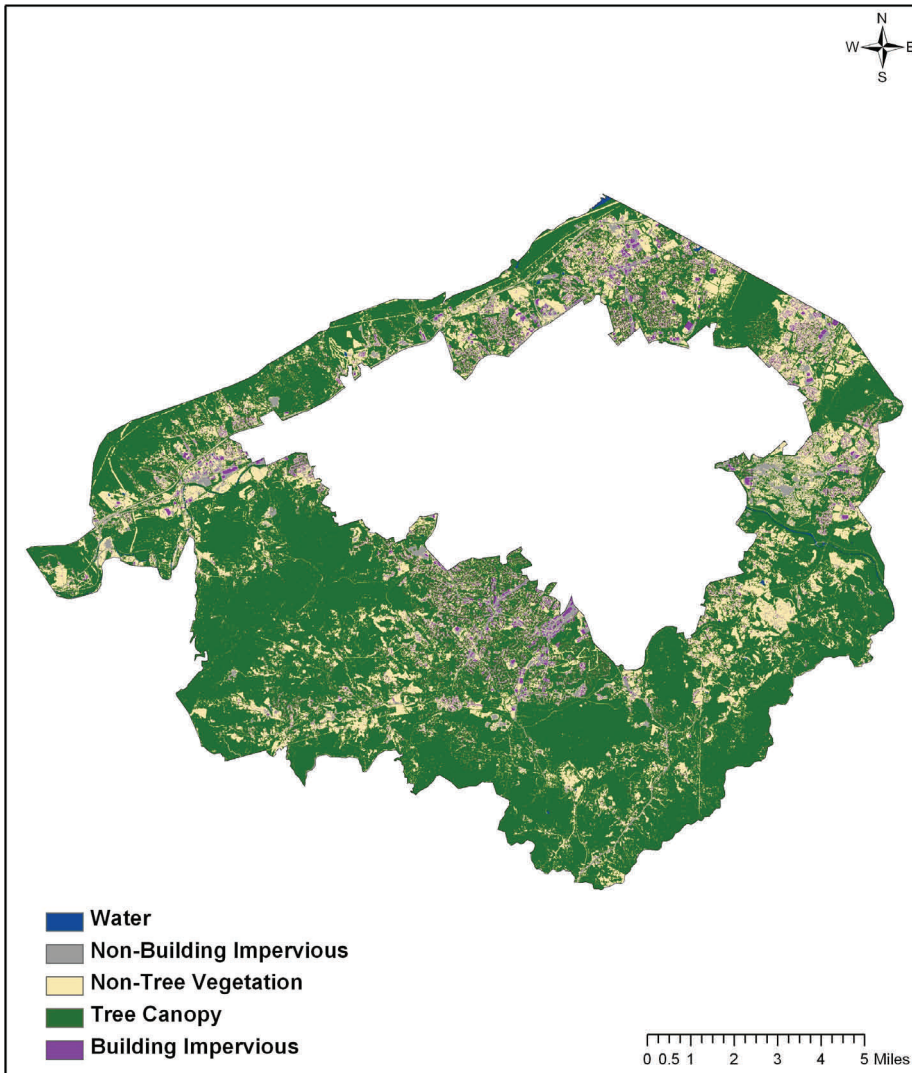
Land Cover: Physical features on the earth mapped from satellite or aerial imagery such as trees, or water.

Existing UTC: The amount of UTC present within parcel boundaries.

Possible UTC: The amount of land that is theoretically available for the establishment of tree canopy within parcel boundaries. Possible UTC excludes areas covered by tree canopy, roads, buildings, and water. It is the combination of Possible UTC - Vegetation and Possible UTC - Impervious.

Possible UTC - Vegetation: The amount of land that is theoretically available for the establishment of tree canopy in non-tree vegetation areas within parcel boundaries. This excludes areas covered by tree canopy, impervious surfaces, and water.

Possible UTC - Impervious: The amount of land that is theoretically available for the establishment of tree canopy in impervious areas within parcel boundaries. This includes impervious areas (roads, parking lots, and sidewalks) except for buildings.



How Much Tree Canopy Does Roanoke County Have?

Figure 1 shows the urban tree canopy (UTC) analysis for Roanoke County, which is derived from high resolution aerial imagery. 57196 acres of Roanoke County is covered by tree canopy (termed Existing UTC). This corresponds to 68.7% of all land area within the county (Table 1). An additional 20433 acres of the county could theoretically be improved to support urban tree canopy (termed Possible UTC), Table 2.

UTC Classes	Existing UTC		
	Acres	% Total Area	% Land Area
Tree Canopy	57196	68.5%	68.7%
Non-Tree Vegetation	16688	20.0%	20.0%
Non-Building Impervious	7639	9.1%	9.2%
Buildings	1724	2.1%	2.1%
Water	248	0.3%	0.3%
Total Area	83495	100%	100%

Table 1: Existing UTC area and percentages for the County * % Total Area includes area covered by

Figure 1: Land cover for Roanoke County.

Mapping Roanoke County's Trees

Using high-resolution (1 meter) National Agriculture Imagery Program (NAIP) imagery acquired in the summer of 2008 (Figure 2a) in combination with remote sensing techniques, land cover data for the county was generated (Figure 2b). An accuracy assessment was conducted. Single trees (tree canopies larger than 16 square meters) were detected with a 93% accuracy.

Who "Owns" Roanoke County's Trees?

The detailed land cover mapping conducted as part of this assessment allowed the percentage of Existing and Possible UTC to be calculated for each parcel of land (Figure 3). Using this data, ownership patterns for Existing UTC and Possible UTC (Figure 4) can be examined.

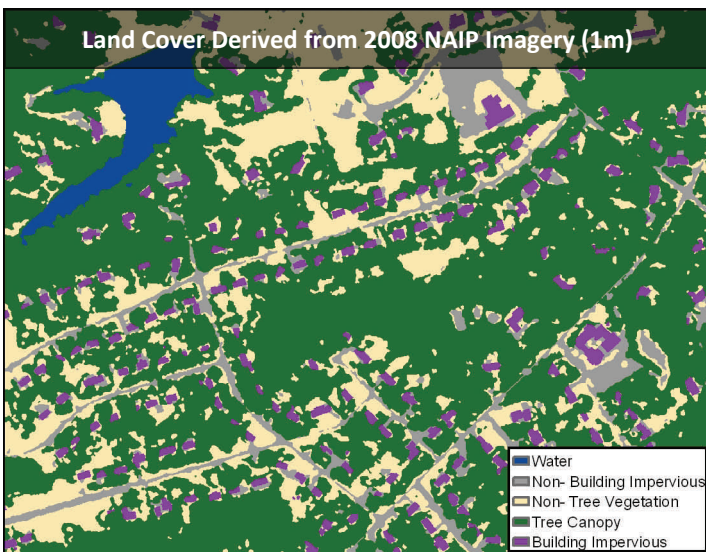
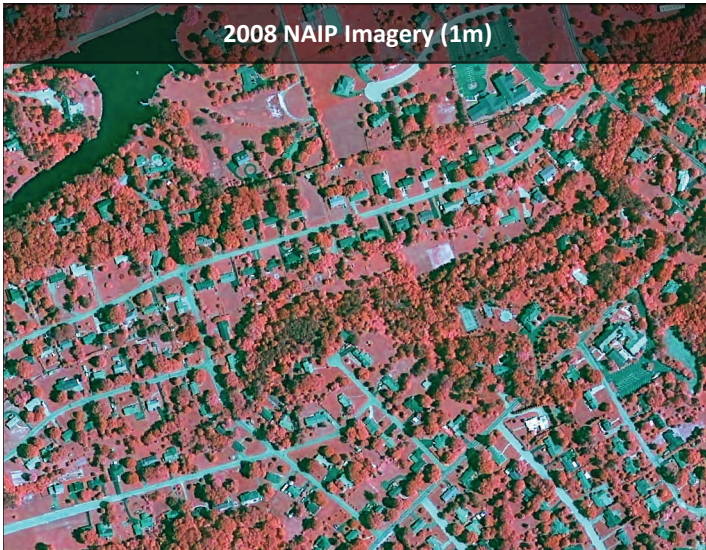
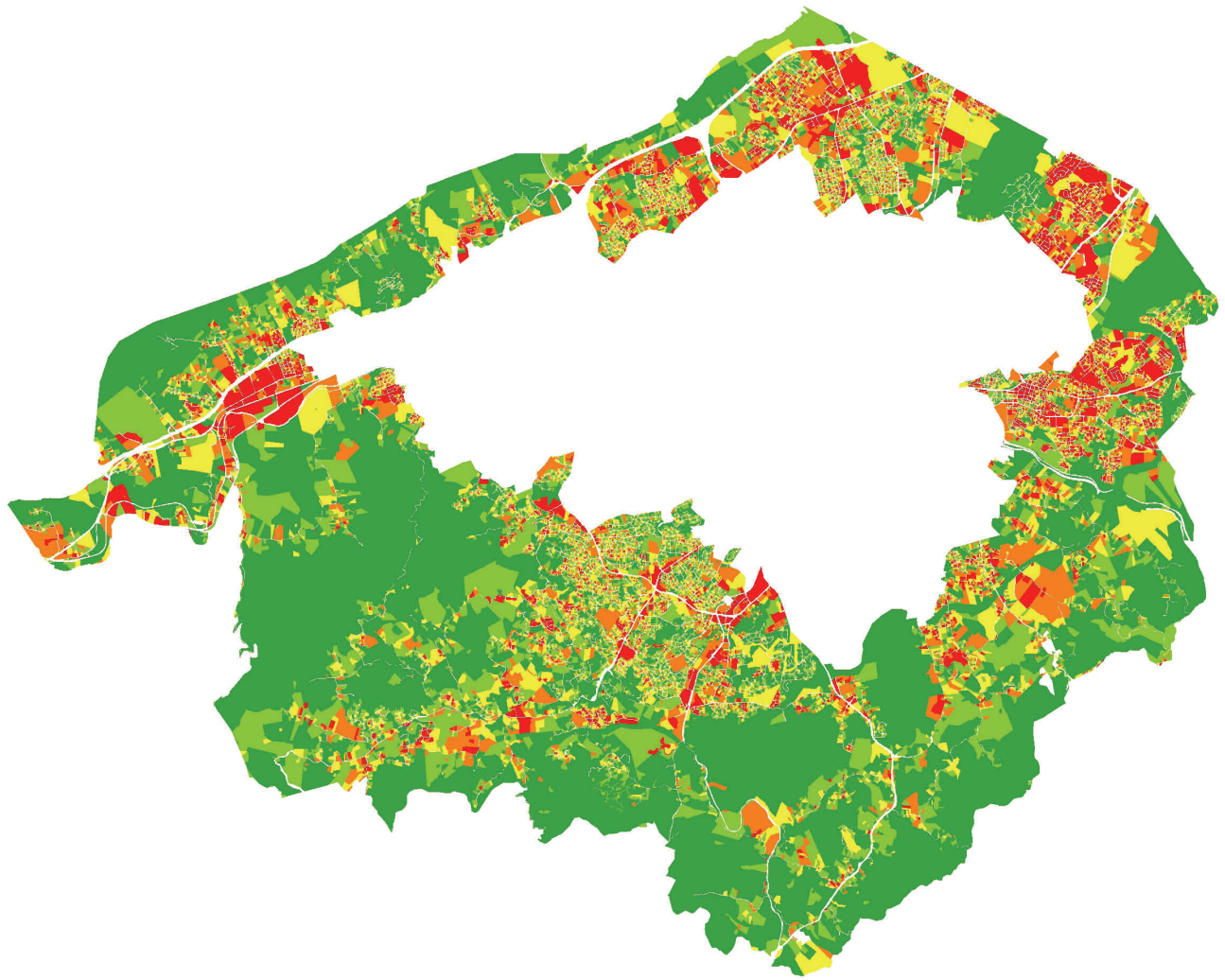


Figure 2a, 2b: Comparison of 2008 NAIP imagery to the resulting high-resolution land cover.

Figure 3: UTC metrics summarized at the property parcel level

Urban Tree Canopy Analysis Summarized by Parcels - Roanoke County, VA



0 0.5 1 2 3 4 5 Miles

Parcels - UTC Existing Percent	
0% - 16%	40% - 60%
17% - 39%	61% - 81%
	82% - 100%



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Canopy analysis completed 2009/12/15 JAP

Figure 4: UTC metrics summarized by property parcel.

1/6/2010

Urban Tree Canopy Summarized by Property Parcels

Using the parcel data provided by Roanoke County, Existing and Possible UTC were summarized by property parcels. This summary excludes any area outside of property parcel boundaries and areas covered by water. Roanoke County has 71.4% (55352 acres) Existing UTC and 26.4% (20433 acres) Possible UTC. Possible UTC has two components, Possible UTC - Vegetation and Possible UTC - Impervious. 19.9% (15417 acres) of parcel land area is associated with Possible UTC - Vegetation. 6.5% (5015 acres) of parcel land area is associated with Possible UTC - Impervious (Figure 5). Figure 4 shows Existing UTC throughout Roanoke County.

Urban Tree Canopy Summarized by Zoning

Using the zoning data provided by Roanoke County, Existing and Possible UTC were summarized by zoning category (page 5). The zoning category R1 has the largest amount of land area with 22010 acres (Table 3). The R1 category also contains 25.3% of the Existing UTC in the county. Zoning Categories AG3 and AG1 contain 34.2% and 19.1% in Existing UTC respectively. Figure 6 compares zoning categories with greater than 20 acres by the amount of land area within the categories. Figure 7 shows the spatial distribution of Possible UTC by Zoning category for the County.

UTC Parcel Metrics	Acres	% Parcel Land Area
Parcel Land Area	77498	100%
Existing UTC	55352	71.4%
Possible UTC	20433	26.4%
Possible UTC - Vegetation	15417	19.9%
Possible UTC - Impervious	5015	6.5%
Not Suitable for UTC	1972	2.5%

Table 2: Acres and percent land area from UTC metrics summarized by property parcels. *Not Suitable for UTC includes all water areas some of which may lay outside of parcel boundaries.

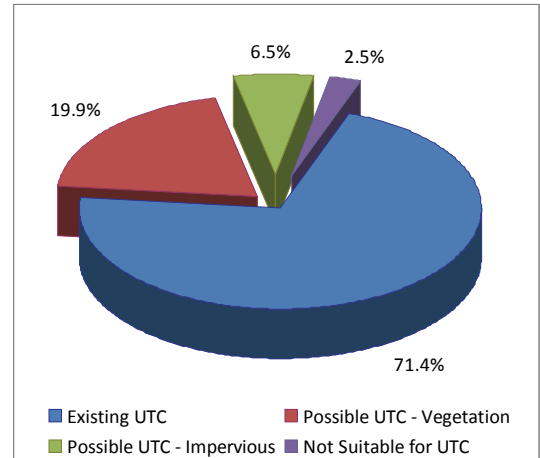


Figure 5: Pie chart showing Roanoke County UTC

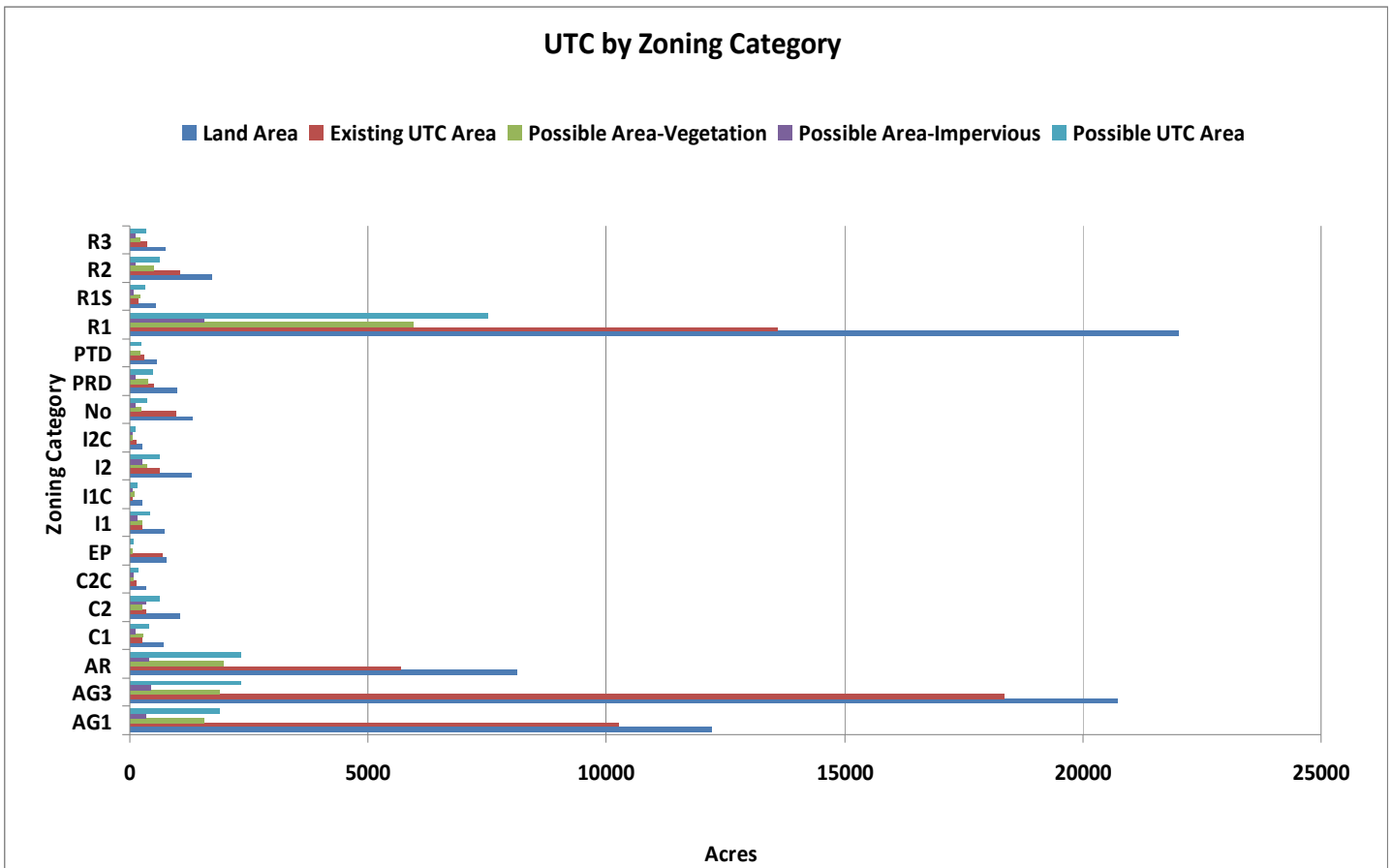


Figure 6a: UTC metrics for zoning categories with more than 200 acres of land area (not including water).

Urban Tree Canopy Summarized by Zoning Category

Zoning Category	Land Area (Acres)	Existing UTC		Possible UTC Vegetation		Possible UTC Impervious	
		% Land Area	% Zoning Category	% Land Area	% Zoning Category	% Land Area	% Zoning Category
AG1	12205	13.8%	84.0%	2.1%	12.8%	0.4%	2.7%
AG3	20717	24.7%	88.6%	2.5%	9.1%	0.6%	2.2%
AR	8115	7.6%	69.9%	2.6%	23.9%	0.5%	4.9%
C1	696	0.3%	35.9%	0.4%	39.6%	0.2%	18.5%
C2	1053	0.4%	31.5%	0.4%	25.5%	0.5%	32.8%
C2C	330	0.2%	39.3%	0.1%	26.5%	0.1%	26.5%
EP	760	0.9%	89.2%	0.1%	9.0%	0.0%	1.6%
I1	724	0.4%	36.6%	0.3%	35.5%	0.2%	21.7%
I1C	267	0.1%	25.4%	0.1%	39.6%	0.1%	20.2%
I2	1299	0.8%	47.1%	0.5%	28.2%	0.3%	19.7%
I2C	260	0.2%	54.6%	0.1%	20.7%	0.1%	22.4%
No Data	1318	1.3%	72.4%	0.3%	18.2%	0.2%	8.9%
PRD	987	0.7%	49.8%	0.5%	37.5%	0.1%	11.1%
PTD	548	0.4%	55.6%	0.3%	39.4%	0.0%	3.5%
R1	22010	18.3%	61.8%	8.0%	27.1%	2.1%	7.1%
R1S	529	0.3%	35.7%	0.3%	43.2%	0.1%	16.4%
R2	1721	1.4%	61.5%	0.7%	29.5%	0.2%	6.8%
R3	744	0.5%	47.3%	0.3%	29.8%	0.2%	16.7%

$$\% \text{ Land} = \frac{\text{Area of UTC type for specified land use}}{\text{Area of all land}}$$

The % Land Use value of 0.5% indicates that 0.5% of "R3" land is covered by tree canopy.

$$\% \text{ Category} = \frac{\text{Area of UTC type for specified land use}}{\text{Area of all land for specified land use}}$$

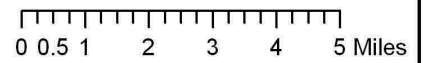
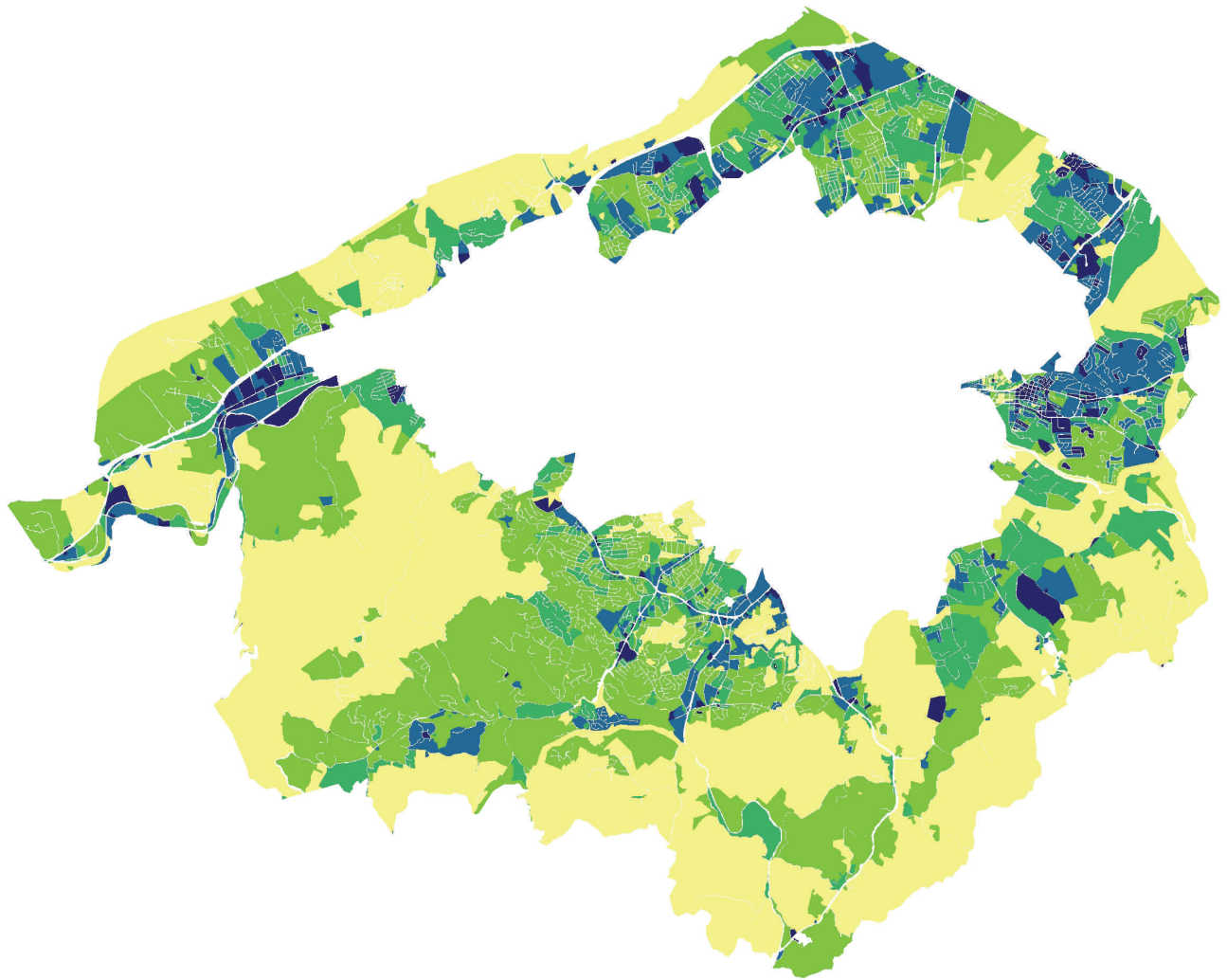
The % Category value of 47.3% indicates that 47.3% of Roanoke County's land area is tree canopy in areas where the land use is "R3".

$$\% \text{ UTC Type} = \frac{\text{Area of UTC type for specified land use}}{\text{Area of all UTC type}}$$

The % UTC Type value of 0.7% indicates that 0.7% of all Existing UTC lies in areas of "R3" land use.

Table 3: UTC metrics by type, summarized by zoning categories with greater than 20 acres. For each category UTC metrics were computed as a percent of all zoned land in the county (% Land Area), as a percent of land area by zoning categories (% Zoning Category) and as a percent of the area for the UTC type (% UTC Type).

Urban Tree Canopy Analysis Summarized by Zoning - Roanoke County, VA



Zoning - UTC Possible Percent	
0% - 18%	38% - 57%
19% - 37%	58% - 78%
	79% - 100%



Canopy analysis completed 2009/12/15 JAP

Figure 7: Possible percentage increase of UTC mapped using zoning categories provided by Roanoke County.

Where to Plant Trees?

Decision makers can use GIS to find out specific UTC metrics for a parcel or set of parcels. This information can be used to estimate the amount of tree loss in a planned development or set UTC improvement goals for an individual property.

Attribute	Value
Land Use	Exempt Commercial
Owner	St Peter & Paul Catholic Church
Address	320 Cathedral Street
Existing UTC	5%
Possible UTC	72%
Possible UTC—Vegetation	47%
Possible UTC—Impervious	25%

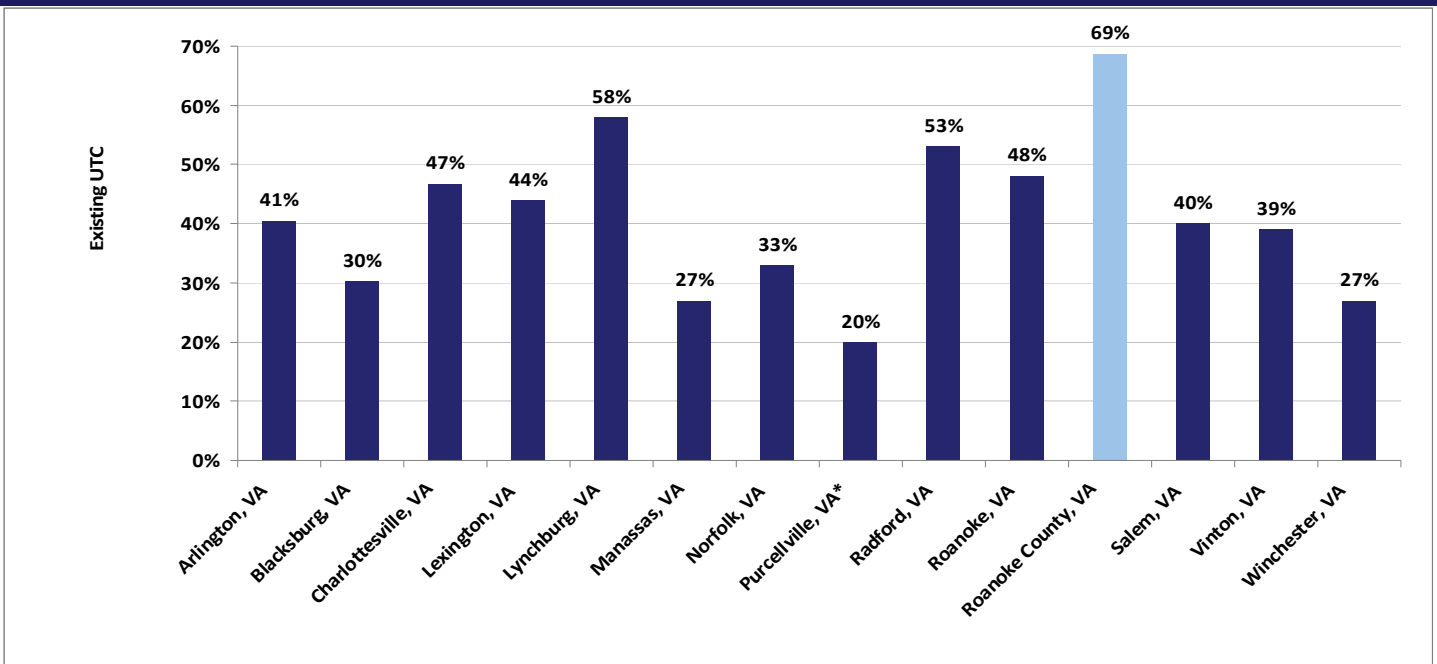


Figure 8: Parcel-based UTC metrics can be used to support targeted UTC.

Conclusions

- Roanoke County's urban tree canopy is a vital community asset, reducing storm water runoff, improving air quality, reducing the county's carbon footprint, enhancing quality of life, contributing to savings on energy bills, and serving as habitat for wildlife.
- With 69% tree canopy cover, Roanoke County has more UTC coverage than any other localities examined to date. Figure 9 shows how Roanoke County compares to other Virginia localities participating in Urban Tree Canopy Assessments.
- When summarized by parcels, Roanoke County has 71.4% Existing UTC. 45% of all parcels have greater than 50% canopy coverage.
- 36.8% of Roanoke County's Possible UTC is within the R1 Zoning Category.

Urban Tree Canopy Comparison



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Additional Information

The study was conducted with funding from the VDCR and VDOF. More information on the UTC assessment project can be found at the following web sites:
http://www3.cnr.vt.edu/gep/VA_UTC.html
<http://nrs.fs.fed.us/urban/utc/>



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