Eureka! also provides a clear vision not only of funding options but also explains how we would implement a no net loss tree canopy program. We believe using a no net loss campaign as a base to grow California’s urban forest would increase public awareness, encourage decision makers to recognize urban and community forests as critical infrastructure and foster innovation and leadership in urban and community forestry programs throughout the state. We draw the conclusion that there is a strong need for a statewide vision. One that clearly dictates what kind of social equity and quality of life improvements can be achieved through substantial investment in canopy cover over an extended period. This vision must persuade the governor to continue support for urban forestry and the transformative potential that harnesses long-term, sustained investment of cap-and-trade auction revenues or other funding sources.

Trees are an integral part of California’s past and present. Our report shows how they can be part of our future, too.
EUREKA!
A Transformative Approach to Sustaining California’s Urban Forests

Urban Forestry requires a sustainable funding source if it is to make a transformative impact on California’s urban landscape. A healthy urban forest adds beauty and improves the quality of residents’ lives while reducing energy consumption and the effects of greenhouse gas emissions. However, time is of the essence.

Eureka! A Transformative Approach to Sustaining California’s Urban Forests takes a very close look at viable funding options for urban forestry and how to ensure no net loss of urban tree canopies, despite continual growth and development in California. We evaluate a range of funding sources for urban forestry and see how they might work today, tomorrow, and in the future. How did urban forestry get where it is today? Which funding options allow for progress? What steps need to be taken to implement a no net loss canopy program?

Our report also delves into the widespread benefits that urban forestry and no net canopy loss programs can bring to the state of California. For example, planting and maintaining trees in economically disadvantaged urban areas improve local residents’ quality of life by adding to the growth of urban tree canopy. Additional trees in these areas improve air quality and help to meet the environmental justice goals of Senate Bill 535 and Assembly Bill 32.

Getting these trees planted and maintained, though, is a tremendous challenge. Bonds and special funds were common methods of financing projects for many years. However, the recent economic downturn makes passing a bond far tougher. 2010’s Proposition 26 requires a supermajority vote on certain fees, Federal funding is also much more limited than in the past, adding to the challenges urban forestry faces. The combination of all these issues makes it much harder now than ever before to fund projects at the statewide level.

Given these difficulties, it is important to examine each possible funding source and determine:

- Can this option provide adequate funding over a long period? Are its economic merits justified for our purposes? Will it generate enough money to make pursuing it worthwhile?

- Will this option have enough political backing to secure required votes, if and when, a funding bill comes before the Legislature? Does it appeal to a broad enough political spectrum? Will the public support it?

- Assuming a funding source meets the other two requirements, do we feel it can be attained in a reasonable time?

Each section looks at different aspects of funding, starting with an introduction and progressing to a detailed study of sustainable urban forestry opportunities within state agencies. Our research shows the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) is unquestionably the best agency to manage and distribute urban forestry funds.

Next, we closely examine individual funding sources and, under the microscope of our urban forestry needs, provide a conclusion about each. Which are likely to sustain urban forestry as it stands right now? Which funding options are closed and which fail our test?

Two funding options appear far more likely to meet urban forestry’s needs than the others we looked at: cap-and-trade auction revenues and the lumber products tax.

Cap-and-trade auction revenues hold the most promise for providing the money California needs to fund urban forestry on a statewide level. “Trading creates incentives to reduce greenhouse gases below allowable levels through investments in clean technologies,” the California Air Resources Board states on its website. “Cap-and-trade is an environmentally effective and economically efficient response to climate change.”

State statutes limit revenue spending from cap-and-trade. One allowable area is urban forestry. Our report examines and explains how even a small portion of these funds can pay for a worthwhile and effective urban forestry program and concludes that CAL FIRE is the best agency to regulate the funds through the existing Urban and Community Forestry program.

The lumber products tax is expected to raise about $30 million a year. $1 million a year from this fund would be needed to support CAL FIRE’s basic urban forestry operations.

Our report also critically examines several other statewide options for funding urban forestry programs. While a few hold promise for the future, others are lacking to varying degrees.