



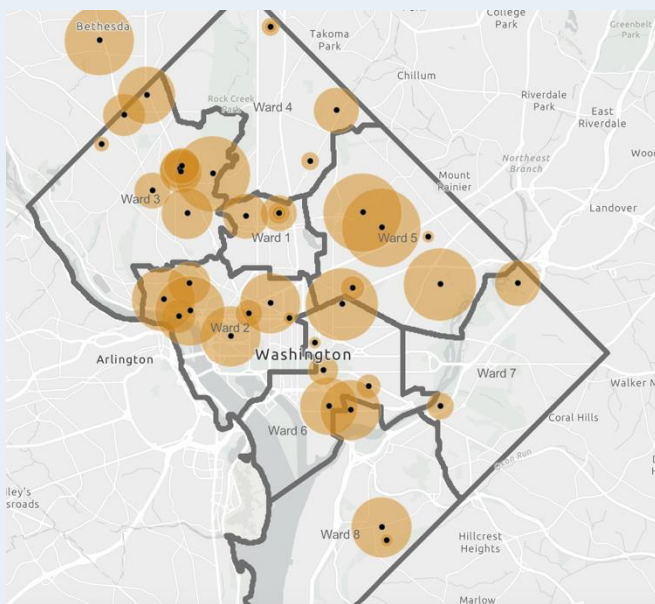
Assessing Ecological Stewardship in the Nation’s Capital: Applying STEW-MAP in Washington, DC

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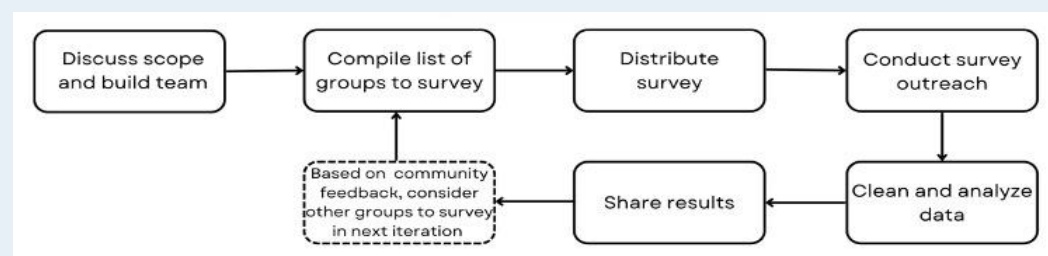
INTRODUCTION

The Stewardship Mapping Project (STEW-MAP), developed by the United States Forest Service (USFS), identifies stewardship organizations working in certain areas, documents their capacity and focus, and spatially maps this information. STEW-MAP offers a way for jurisdictions to identify and categorize the various work around care for local ecology, from tree planting and litter removal to river cleanups and schoolyard gardening, and to develop a network among existing groups, in turn strengthening community-based work around pressing issues such as urban habitat and resilience, environmental justice, and climate change mitigation. The Washington DC survey and mapping process engaged local organizations as both survey respondents and research collaborators, referencing Arnstein’s (1969) thesis that power comes from collaboration. (See Map of Stewardship Organizations, below.)



MATERIALS & METHODS

This approach adhered to the USFS STEW-MAP six-step process. From fall 2022 to fall 2023, we worked with organizations in the District, including local stewardship partner Capital Nature to modify the survey and create a list of local organizations engaged in ecological stewardship work. We refined and piloted the survey; and in March 2024 distributed the final (Qualtrics) survey via email to 90 organizations. This outreach involved personalized emails as well as follow-up emails and phone calls to encourage participation. Forty five (45) organizations completed surveys (response rate of 50%). We cleaned and analyzed our data, created the interactive map and written report documenting this effort, and hosted a community meeting reviewing both the report and the mapping tool in September 2024.



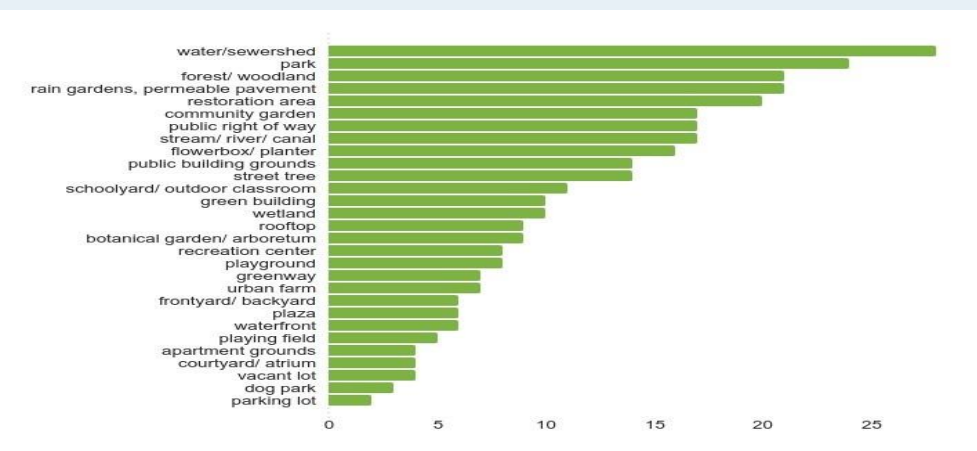
RESULTS

Organizational Focus and Capacity

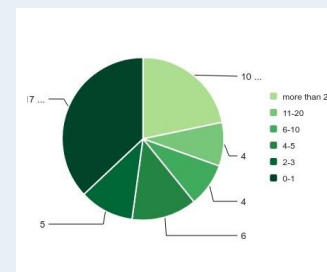
Though all organizations surveyed engage in stewardship, their specific focus varies. The three most common types of work undertaken by organizations were: education including research, and training (91% of groups engage in this work); managing or restoring the local environment (84% of groups); and advocating or planning for the environment – including organizing and fundraising (80% of groups). Most groups (95%) identified that they work together and partner with other groups to support environmental work.



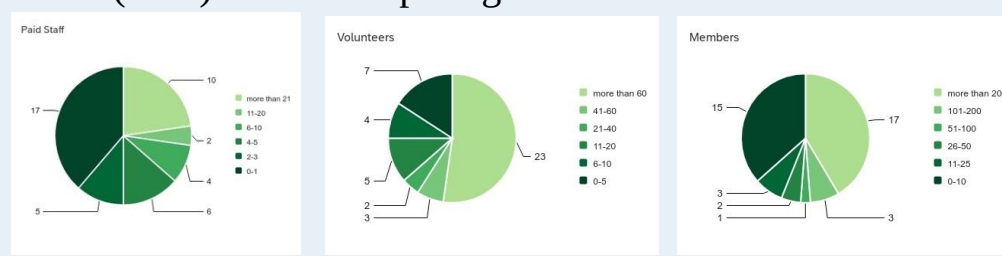
Much work focused on large geographical areas including watersheds (59%), forests/woodlands (46%), restoration areas (43%), and streams/ rivers/ canals (36%). Other focus areas include more urban geography such as rain gardens and bioswales (43%), public right of way (39%), community gardens (36%), planters (36%), and street trees (32%).



Organizations tended to have either very small (\$0 - \$1,000) or very large (greater than \$5,000,000) annual budgets.

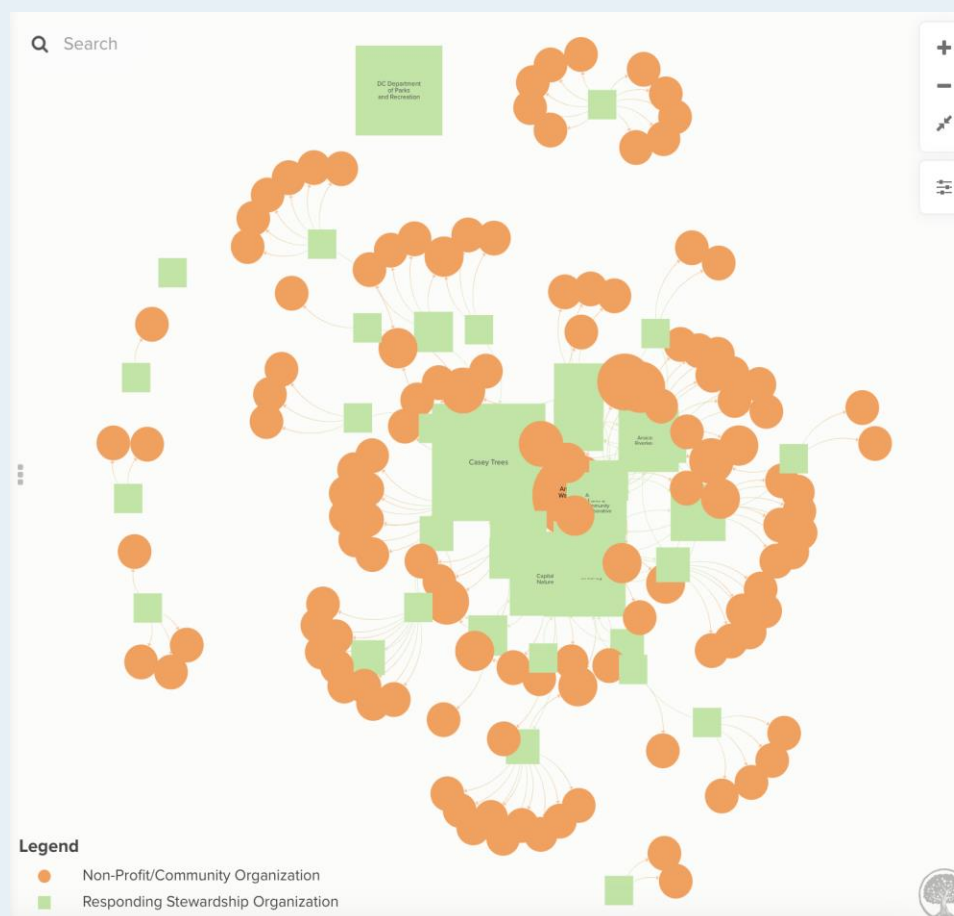


Organizations likewise had relatively large (more than 21) or very small (0-1) staff sizes (39%); large (more than 60) or small (0-10) volunteer capacity; and large (more than 200) or small (0-10) membership ranges.



Inter-Organizational Networking

We created a network map showing connections between survey respondents and specific organizational categories: non-profits and community organizations, government agencies and programs, schools and educational institutions, businesses and business organizations. [See screenshot below, and note the real power comes through the online interactive platform.] Organizations are marked by green squares, non-profit/community organizations are marked by orange circles, and are dynamically sized based on the number of times they were mentioned as a collaborator in the free response survey questions.



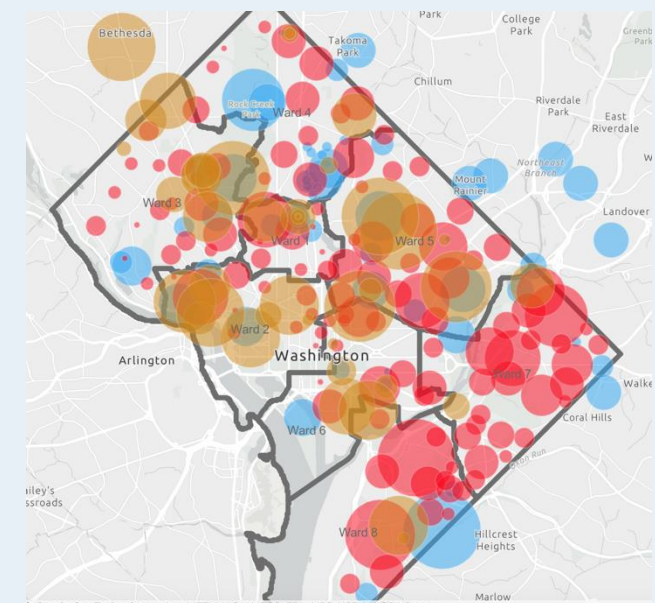
Sharing Results with the DC Community of Stewardship

At a community meeting to share survey results we presented the online interactive map. Participants were excited to learn about the results, and especially to interact with the map.

- This has been really insightful. I know personally I want to look into more detail about the heat map, the urban hot spots. So that's just my personal curiosity. This has been really exciting.*
- This is to me going to be a great tool that we can use. Thank you so very much.*
- This is a FANTASTIC resource. You are doing amazing work by compiling this data and we look forward to utilizing it in our own research and communications.*

DISCUSSION

The DC STEW-MAP survey shows environmental stewardship taking place across Washington, DC, although in uneven ways. Most groups engaged in educational outreach, ecological restoration, and/or advocacy. Some of the city’s poorest neighborhoods are home to significant ecological stewardship activity; noting some organizations may want to focus their efforts on neighborhoods that may have been historically underserved. Organizations with higher capacities are working at wider scales across the city, while organizations with lower capacity are working in more specific, neighborhood-based sites. (See Map of Neighborhoods Served, below.)



CONCLUSION

This research adds Washington DC to the list of cities represented in the USFS STEW-MAP database. Surveying local environmental stewardship organizations for their mission, capacity, and work highlights stewardship gaps and opportunities that can be valuable for promoting engagement, building partnerships, and effectively allocating limited resources. We hope that this study, along with the online map, will help document efforts currently underway; enable stewards of the environment to find and connect with each other; and enable identification of places where additional stewardship may be needed.

Arnstein, S. R. A Ladder Of Citizen Participation. *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 1969, 35 (4), 216–224. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01944366908977225>.

United States Forest Service. The Stewardship Mapping Project (STEW-MAP). 2023.

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