Tree, Shrub and Ground Cover of the Forest

What is tree cover?
Tree canopy cover is a common metric used to quantify the amount of area directly and indirectly influenced by trees. It is ecologically important because it indicates how much of an effect the forest has on the micro-climate (e.g. shade in parking lots and homes) as well as how much rain is intercepted by the trees. Tree cover is also important because it helps provide shade, acts as a windbreak, and helps reduce air pollution.

How much tree cover is in Tampa?
The UFORE study results show that the city wide average tree cover is approximately 28%.

What is shrub cover?
Shrub cover is often overlooked and undervalued as a component of the urban forest. Like tree cover, it is an estimate of the amount of area in the urban forest covered by shrubs. Shrub cover is an important attribute of the urban forest because it adds structural complexity and diversity, both of which have ecological and aesthetic value. In addition to providing some of the same benefits as trees, such as preventing soil erosion and nutrient runoff, shrubs also help remove pollutants from the atmosphere.

How much shrub cover is in Tampa?
In Tampa, it is estimated that approximately 13.5% of the city is covered with shrubs.

What is ground cover?
Ground cover is divided into two broad categories: impervious (asphalt, buildings, and cement) and pervious (bare soil, duff, herbs, maintained grass, rock, un-maintained grass and water) surfaces. Urbanization tends to increase the amount of impervious surface, which affects hydrological processes that occur such as aquifer recharge and surface runoff. Pervious surfaces allow the natural cycle of rainfall and stormwater flow to soak into the ground and maintain a healthy and plentiful aquifer.

How is ground cover distributed in Tampa?
Thirty three percent of the ground cover in the city is classified as impervious. The remaining 77 percent consists of pervious surfaces, including maintained grass, rock, water, bare soil, herbs, wild grass and duff (Figure 1).

Figure 5: Distribution of ground cover types in Tampa.