Recent high temperatures, fierce wildfires and lack of significant rainfall are increasing interest in protecting and promoting one of Nebraska’s most precious resources, trees. More than 30 towns have committed to planting an estimated 500 trees this fall in an effort to improve city parks, trails and school yards.

ReTree Nebraska urges Nebraskans to plant a tree in celebration of ReTree Week, Sept. 23-29. This 10-year cooperative initiative promotes the proper planting and care of 1 million trees in Nebraska communities by 2017. More information is available at ReTreeNebraska.org.

“Trees provide important benefits to Nebraska communities,” said Sally Ganem, Nebraska’s first lady and ReTree Nebraska chair. “Some benefits of trees we can see, some we can’t. All of them carry forward to benefit future generations of Nebraskans. Our investment today will pay dividends in the future.”

Severe weather, drought, poor planting practices or species selection, insects, disease and an aging tree population all have contributed to the decline in the number of community trees across the state. Planting new trees is an essential part of maintaining Nebraska’s community forest, and fall planting offers important benefits.

“Fall is an excellent time to plant trees,” said Jessica Kelling, ReTree Nebraska coordinator. “Cooler temperatures mean newly planted trees can get a head start on spring growth by establishing good root systems.”

Across Nebraska, there are about 470,000 acres of community forests. These trees were planted by previous generations that understood the long-term benefits they would provide, such as cleaner air, healthier soil and wildlife habitats. Planting a tree provides much-needed shade during hot Nebraska summers, which helps reduce energy costs for homeowners, schools and businesses.

On average, every dollar invested in the community forest returns an average of $2.70 in net annual benefits. Nearly $9.7 billion in environmental, social and economic benefits are provided by 13.3 million trees in Nebraska communities, but that’s half the number of trees that were present 30 years ago.

A network of volunteers across the state works closely with ReTree Nebraska organizers to help promote ReTree Week. More than 300 ReTree ambassadors in 112 Nebraska communities coordinate tree planting and educate citizens about the economic, environmental, social, psychological and physical value of trees.

“ReTree Nebraska strives to educate people about the benefits of trees and proper planting procedures to sustain and extend the tree’s life,” said Eric Berg, Nebraska Forest Service community forestry and sustainable landscapes program leader. “Creating and maintaining a sustainable landscape is about selecting and properly planting the right tree, in the right place, in the right way.”

Libraries are getting involved in ReTree Week this year by providing book displays, bookmarks, posters and activities to help educate Nebraskans about the benefits of trees.

ReTree Nebraska is a cooperative effort of the Nebraska Forest Service, Nebraska Statewide Arboretum, the University of Nebraska Rural Initiative, the University of Nebraska–Lincoln Department of Agronomy and Horticulture and the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources. Some projects are taking advantage of a mini-grant funded by the Nebraska Environmental Trust, a beneficiary of the Nebraska Lottery.

To learn more about ReTree Nebraska, report a tree planting or find out more about tree

selection, planting and care, visit ReTreeNebraska.org or email retreenebraska@unl.edu.