

This year's greener landscapes are increasing interest in the ReTree Nebraska celebration, especially after last year's severe drought triggered concern for trees. Improvement in drought conditions in some parts of Nebraska and the forecast for a cooler fall has many feeling more confident about planting one of the most precious resources, the trees.

From the Panhandle to the Missouri River, towns large and small have planned a total of 80 projects to plant new trees. In total, these towns have committed to planting an estimated 1,000 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. 22-28. This 10-year cooperative initiative promotes the proper planting and care of 1 million trees in Nebraska communities by 2017.

"Trees are one of the most important resources for Nebraska communities," said Sally Ganem, Nebraska's first lady and ReTree Nebraska chair. "Trees represent a major investment in our communities that pays dividends for generations. The economic benefits of trees go far beyond providing shade for our schools and parks. Tree-lined business districts welcome shoppers and often encourage them to shop longer and more often."

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.

"Planting trees in the fall gives trees a head start on spring," said Jessica Kelling, ReTree Nebraska coordinator. "The cooler temperatures of fall help trees establish good root systems, which promotes spring growth."

Across Nebraska, there are approximately 470,000 acres of community forests. These trees were planted by previous generations who 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.

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.

ReTree Nebraska is a cooperative effort led by the Nebraska Forest Service, the 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 take advantage of a mini-grant funded by the Nebraska Environmental Trust, a beneficiary of the Nebraska Lottery.

Local Efforts

Three local groups have taken advantage of the above-mentioned mini-grants. The Grant Tree Board, the class of 2014 and Pheasant Run Golf Course have each applied for a grant through which they will receive up to 10 free trees to add to the community.

The Grant Tree Board bypassed an Arbor Day celebration, opting to plan activities in conjunction with ReTree Nebraska Week. The activities will take place at a later date in October, and are to include several tree plantings, as well as pruning of downtown trees and a

workshop by Nebraska Forest Service forester Amy Seiler of Gering.

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.