

Kalkaska tree planting event calls on nature lovers to roll up their sleeves, dig in

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Michigan United Conservation Clubs host a native tree planting project Oct. 24 in the Pere Marquette Forest to improve wildlife habitat.

The MUCC On the Ground program event calls on volunteers to help plant 90 mature fruit-bearing trees near Johnson Lake in Kalkaska County.

“Traverse City and Kalkaska area are renowned for their beauty and natural resources. Planting trees is a powerful way to improve the ecosystem,” said MUCC habitat volunteer coordinator Makhayla LaButte.

A Michigan Department of Natural Resources Wildlife Habitat Grant funds the Kalkaska initiative. Program dollars come from state hunting and fishing license fees.

“It’s an opportunity for hunters, anglers, trappers, birders and kayakers to come out and give back,” LaButte said.

Wildlife biologist Gib King designed the habitat improvement plan which supports DNR goals for wildlife management on public land. He said the trees planted across several miles will impact an even larger area.

Apple, pear, hawthorn and cherry trees volunteer crews plant will produce fruit next year. Each tree receives mulch, a tree guard and a four-foot fence allowing deer to access fruit without damaging trees. The effort requires 180 bags of mulch. 360 steel posts and 1,500 feet of fencing.

“We are reintroducing native trees that would regularly occur in this area and habitat type but may have had an issue becoming established in this exact planting location through natural events,” said first-time MUCC volunteer Mikayla Leishman.

The Kingsley resident works for Wildlife and Wetlands Solutions, a private habitat management company.

“By putting in the physical effort to plant these trees, we are investing in their success and hoping for their long-term well-being,” she said. “We are also making efforts to improve our local landscape which improves our sense of place within the community.”

The project affords food and shelter benefits for game and nongame species, including ruffed grouse, wild turkey, white-tailed deer and snowshoe hare.

“Everyone is worried about snowshoe hare,” King said. According to a Michigan State University study, the species in the Lower Peninsula has declined by nearly 50 percent.

MUCC’s On the Ground program since 2013 enlisted more than 3,000 volunteers in weekend projects improving wildlife habitat.

“It’s a great program,” King said. “It gives back to the resource from which it came and brings partners together.”

Leishman said the Kalkaska project increases habitat value as the trees grow.

“I look forward to coming back to this site in 50 years and explaining to my grandchildren how I helped plant the forest we will be standing in,” she said.

Volunteers for the Kalkaska tree planting may register at mucc.org. The event runs from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., but volunteers are not required to commit to working the entire day. Volunteers should bring work gloves and a face mask. All volunteers receive a T-shirt and are invited to share a brat and burger meal at the end of the day.

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