

POWELL TRIBUNE

Powell tree planting program takes roots

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The first round of trees planted by volunteers for the Homesteader Roots program are in the ground. Plans are already being made for the next round in a long-term attempt to help replace Powell's aging urban canopy.

Powell Boy Scouts from Troop 26 and volunteers from the community planted seven trees Saturday morning. From prairie dream paper birches to bur oaks, homeowners watched as the group made quick work with hand shovels. This is just the beginning, as group organizer Josh Pomeroy hopes to ramp up the plantings in the next round.

"I would like to be planting 25 trees a year through this program," he said. "So we essentially need to triple donations and triple the number of people that want to be involved in it."

"We're hoping that actually seeing the planting done and our signs that we can get a lot of interest in it, because I think that it has an important role to play in our community going forward," Pomeroy said.

Jacy and Terry O'Neill were the first to get a tree. It will eventually replace the shade and habitat of a tree they need to remove. The old silver-leaf poplar has a few leaves left on one branch, but is mostly bare and has become a liability. The O'Neills have been hoping for a new addition in their yard since moving into the home three years ago.

"We're real excited," Terry said. Jacy wanted an aspen, and the couple considered a sensation maple, "but we decided on the paper birch because of its white bark."

The program is being used in communities across the state. In Cheyenne, volunteers are planting 400 trees a year, Pomeroy said. The goal in Powell is modest in comparison, but it's a start to help keep the city beautiful into the future.

"I hope that people see it as it's happening so that they realize that this is something that we can actually do in our community," Pomeroy said.

Many of Powell's mature trees were planted by homesteaders in the area. A combination of age, disease and insects, plus years of neglect means that many of the city's biggest, oldest trees are near the end of their life cycles, he said.

"Somebody has to think about what Powell will look like in 50 years," said Pomeroy, who owns Blue Ribbon Tree Service.

Although the trees have been planted for the year, the real work is just starting as the group looks for new donors.

"We essentially spent all the donations that we brought in on these trees, and the advertising trying to get the word out," he said. "This next year really is it's going to come down to who wants to step up in our community and donate to the program to make sure it succeeds."

Homesteader Roots has two goals: to provide ongoing education about the benefits of trees and to plant new ones. Trees planted by the group will be long-living, slow-growing species. Residents participating in the program can choose between several species — including shademaster honeylocust, bur oak, Ohio buckeye, Kentucky coffee tree and greenspire littleleaf lindens to be planted at their home.

A healthy urban forest is biodiverse when no one species accounts for more than 30% of the population, Pomeroy said. Within the next decade, issues in Powell's urban canopy could grow much worse because more than 60% of the trees in the city are green ash, a species under attack by the emerald ash borer. The insect has laid waste to millions of ash trees across the nation on its path west to Wyoming. The Cowboy State is now partially surrounded, as the ash borer has been reported in Colorado, Nebraska and South Dakota.

The program costs the homeowner a one-time fee of \$50, covering about 10-20% of a typical fee for the service. Qualifying trees for the program will be slow-growing hardwoods, helping the city develop a new bio-diverse urban forest. Volunteers will plant, water and care for the tree for one year to ensure the plantings are successful.

Applications to receive trees through the Homesteader Roots project are available at businesses throughout the city as well as City Hall.

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