

## **Rooted in history: Longmont works to protect more than 22,000 city trees**

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The more than 22,000 trees growing in Longmont are rooted in both the city's past and its future.

Most of the city's trees didn't start growing naturally in Longmont. Early residents first planted the trees like the cottonwood and elm, bringing water from the St. Vrain Creek in buckets to keep them alive. Today's city workers continue that legacy as they fight to protect local trees against the major threats: a dry climate and the emerald ash borer.



Brett Stads vold is a city forester for Longmont Forestry Services who helps to preserve the life of the more than 100 local tree varieties through code enforcement and management of arborists in the field. Longmont's trees provide shade, help capture water and prevent runoff and soil erosion, while also protecting people in a world that will continue to be shaped by a changing climate.

"As we know, our climate is getting hotter and drier, we can only assume the people who came to Longmont planted trees mostly for the shade and helping to cool their homes and where they live," Stads vold said. "In helping us adapt to our future climate, trees are really important in continuing to help Longmont be a hospitable place to live."

Erik Mason, a curator of history at the Longmont Museum, said settlers started planting trees in Longmont as soon as they arrived from Chicago in 1871. The people from the Chicago-Colorado Colony arrived on the Front Range to search for an unsettled area near a water source that would

allow them to create a town and irrigate farms. The first census, taken in 1880, shows that there were about 773 people living in Longmont, Mason said.

“A lot of them were coming from Chicago, where there were a lot more trees and a wetter climate, so they were wanting to recreate some of that in Colorado and that was a challenge,” Mason said.

To keep the trees alive, before the city water system was established in 1879, they had to go to the St. Vrain Creek to gather water in buckets and bring it back to the trees, he said.

“They were really pretty dedicated to keeping the growing trees and creating the tree-filled city we have today,” Mason said.

Along Main Street, Midwestern settlers planted cottonwood trees, which would later be cut down between 1905 and 1910 because the trees had become too old. In the 1960s, trees were replanted downtown. Mason said he was not sure whether any of the 1960s trees still stand today, but noted that trees planted along a street usual don’t live long. The trees seen today are likely the result of several cycles since the 1960s plantings, he said. Part of Stadsvold’s job is helping Longmont trees to survive things that threaten them the most, one of which is not having enough access to water, which will become more critical as the climate is anticipated to get hotter and dryer. With some people redesigning their yards with xeriscaping, a landscaping made to use little water, Stadsvold said it’s important to remember trees still need to be watered.

“Water is the best medicine to help a tree stay healthy and fight off pests and diseases,” Stadsvold.

The other threat is the notorious emerald ash borer, a wood-boring beetle discovered in Michigan in 2002 that has killed tens of millions of ash trees in the U.S. In 2019, Longmont lost about 50 trees to the invasive insect on both public and private land. This year, Stadsvold said the city is planning to remove about 200 trees across public and private lands because of the emerald ash borer.

“We don’t have any hard numbers, but we anecdotally think that ash trees make up a large component of privately planted trees across the city,” Stadsvold said. “There’s a huge threat to losing a major portion of our urban forest, specifically on private property, which makes up the largest portion of our urban tree canopy.”

The city has a [criteria and plan](#) for treating trees infected by the beetle, including use of a pesticide, called Tree-Age, and tree removal, according to the city’s website. Stadsvold said the city also works with homeowners to inspect ash trees and remove or treat those that are sick.

“We are helping these residents identify trees that have EAB (emerald ash borer), before the trees are totally dead. At that point, they have less options for removal,” Stadsvold said. “We are working with private property owners ... and we are proactively removing ash trees from public property that are in poor condition, that were planted in poor locations or they are smaller and it’s just easier to replace them.”

The city is working to assure that the tree inventory continues to grow, despite these threats. During an annual Longmont tree planting program in March, people can buy shade trees at a reduced cost. This year, because of the coronavirus pandemic, trees were delivered to peoples’ homes. Usually about 200 trees are sold to private property owners, Stadsvold said. The city also plants between 300 to 425 trees each year. Stadsvold said in 2021, the city plans to plant 420 trees on public property.

Thompson Park is the city's "unofficial arboretum," Stadsvold said when asked the best place to view Longmont's trees. Some of the greatest variety of trees in Longmont can be found in the park, including the colorful autumn purple ash, pyramidal-shaped Turkish filbert tree, crab apples and ponderosa trees. The park also serves as a reminder of just how far Longmont's trees have come. Both Mason and Stadsvold said they've heard stories of early residents bringing water to Thompson Park to feed the young trees.

Stadsvold encouraged people to view the city's online tree inventory, which features a map of all the local trees, naming the tree's location and variety. The map can be found on the city's webpage at [longmontcolorado.gov](https://www.longmontcolorado.gov) by searching [tree inventory](#). If residents are looking for planting suggestions of tree types that thrive in Longmont, Stadsvold said the inventory also serves as a reference.

"We have very few trees that are native to Colorado," Stadsvold said. "We try to find trees that will adapt well to our environment, dealing with heat, drought and snow loads that we get in the late spring."

Source: <https://www.timescall.com/2020/08/11/rooted-in-history-longmont-works-to-protect-more-than-22000-city-trees/>