
Tree Planting Is Important in Nebraska History

Nebraska State Forester, Dennis Adams shared this information on the history of Conservation Trees in Nebraska. Tree planting is a tradition in Nebraska. Early settlers often transported tree seed or seedlings hundreds of miles to plant on barren homesteads. They realized the value of trees for protection, wood products, conservation and beauty. They often took great pains to plant and nurture the fragile seedlings.

The following quotation is an excerpt from an 1891 article describing conditions on the Great Plains: "To see the prairie and the plains is to know their needs. To travel over them, even for a day, will make you feel their greatest want - the want of trees. Windswept every day, every hour, the comparative calm with even a single row of trees creates affords relief from the perpetual activity of the air beyond the influence of the windbreak. Man, beast and plant are constantly being dried out; evaporation can hardly keep the thirsty, ever-moving atmosphere supplied with moisture, and many a rain only touches the ground to be at once evaporated and returned to the clouds.

Organized tree distribution began in Nebraska as far back as 1904, when Rep. Moses P. Kinkaid introduced a bill which authorized the free distribution of trees west of the 100th meridian. This plan affected the western one-half of Nebraska, generally west of the present day Cozad. The success of this operation was poor, as quantities of trees were limited and supervision was unsatisfactory. However, the records show that more than 1.9 million trees were distributed from Bessey Nursery at Halsey between 1912 and 1924 to 9,298 applicants.

On June 7, 1924, the Clarke-McNary Act was passed by Congress. This act authorized the Secretary of Agriculture to cooperate with the various states in the "procurement, production, and distribution of forest-tree seed and plants, for the purpose of establishing windbreaks, shelterbelts, and farm woodlots upon denuded or non-forest lands."

The plan became an instant success. In 1926, when the first plantings were made in Nebraska, 33,900 trees were distributed to 96 cooperators in 44 counties. To date, over 100 million tree and shrub seedlings have been planted for conservation purposes in Nebraska.

The current Conservation Trees for Nebraska program is coordinated by the Nebraska Association of Resource Districts, with each Natural Resource District administering its local tree program. Approximately 1 million conservation tree/shrub seedlings are distributed by Nebraska's 23 NRD's each year.

Although conservation tree programs vary by NRD, generally tree orders begin about Nov. 1 each year. Again this year, approximately 1 million tree and shrub seedlings are available. Selections can be made from a wide variety of tree and shrub species that are hardy and adopted to Nebraska. Call the your Natural Resource District office TODAY as orders are finalized in early March.

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