



Colorado State Forest Service

La Junta District 2015 Annual Report

The Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS) mission is to achieve stewardship of Colorado's diverse forest environments for the benefit of present and future generations.

Message from the CSFS La Junta District

The Colorado State Forest Service would like to wish you a happy, healthy and 'tree-prosperous' 2016!

Many new adventures are heading our way in 2016. But before we get started, let us look back at 2015 and reflect on all the accomplishments many of you have contributed to improving our tree resources in southeast Colorado communities and rural areas. A special thanks to each of you from the Colorado State Forest Service La Junta District!

The CSFS La Junta District serves Baca, Bent, Cheyenne, Crowley, Kiowa, Otero and Prowers counties. Envisioned in 1981, the district is celebrating 34 years of forestry services for our many partners, publics, communities and, most importantly, you – our Colorado citizens.

At the CSFS La Junta District, we're all about: people, forest health and providing forestry-based technical support.

Colorado State Forest Service Celebrates 60th Anniversary

In 2015, the Colorado State Forest Service celebrated its 60th anniversary – providing six decades of timely, relevant forestry information to Colorado. Established in 1955, the CSFS, headquartered in Fort Collins, is a service and outreach agency of the Warner College of Natural Resources at Colorado State University.

The agency also provides staffing for the Division of Forestry within the Colorado Department of Natural Resources.

Approximately 105 full-time and 30 seasonal CSFS employees help improve forest conditions and serve Coloradans from 19 field offices throughout the state. Each year, the agency helps treat more than 20,000 acres of forestland and assists approximately 6,400 landowners and hundreds of communities to improve forest health, and provides forest management on state lands.



... and growing

"Our forests supply many critical benefits for the State of Colorado. The Colorado State Forest Service, leveraging the resources of the Warner College of Natural Resources at CSU, provides the leadership and commitment to ensure healthy and resilient forests for Coloradans now and for the future," said Mike Lester, State Forester and Director of the CSFS.

CSFS programs and services include forest and timber management; insect and disease detection; growing trees and shrubs for conservation; wildfire mitigation assistance and outreach; invasive species planning and response; wood utilization assistance and outreach; and education for forest landowners, communities, teachers and homeowner associations.

“The CSFS plays a critical role linking on-the-ground management to cutting-edge research findings and education of landowners and Colorado’s public,” said Dr. John Hayes, Dean, Warner College of Natural Resources.

In 2015, the CSFS and USDA Forest Service (USFS) also celebrated the 25th anniversary of the 1990 Farm Bill, which significantly enhanced the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act, enabling the USFS to provide broad financial and technical assistance to states and private landowners.

Tree City U.S.A. Communities in Southeast Colorado

Nine communities in southeast Colorado were each recognized as being a National Arbor Day Foundation Tree City U.S.A. in 2015. Thank you to the local tree boards and their chairs for working toward healthy community forests in southeast Colorado:

- Baca County – Donitta Johnson, Campo (11 years) and Kathy Self, Springfield (24 years)
- Crowley County – Berniece McClure, Olney Springs (10 Years) and Patricia Cole, Ordway (12 years)
- Kiowa County – Marvin Watson, Eads (21 years)
- Otero County – Brad Swartz/Steve Vanhook, La Junta (34 years), Phyllis Adkins, Rocky Ford (23 years), and Tom Brubaker, Swink (17 years)
- Prowers County – Jane Felter, Lamar (24 years)

To qualify as a Tree City U.S.A., a community must have: 1) an established tree board or department; 2) a community tree ordinance; 3) a community forestry program with an annual budget of at least \$2 per capita; and 4) an annual Arbor Day celebration.

Healthy, sustainable community forests do not just happen by chance. They require ongoing care, including tree planting, maintenance, removals,

education and administration. The Tree City U.S.A. program supports active management at levels that fit each individual community’s population and resources. All of our tree boards are made up of volunteers who care about their community and the trees in them. Congratulations to each of you and your communities!

2015 Colorado Tree Coalition Grants in Southeast Colorado

Teaming Up for Trees



Teaming Up For Trees involved lots of people, tree-enthusiasm, and plantings in southeast Colorado!

Seven Tree City U.S.A. communities teamed up to successfully apply for a \$1,500 Colorado Tree Coalition (CTC) Planting Grant in 2015. Here are the results, totaling 61 trees of 20 varieties:

- Campo, \$50 matching grant – 2 trees – a Canadian cherry and a boxelder sensation.
- Springfield, \$200 matching grant – 6 trees – all boxelder sensations.
- Lamar, \$400 matching grant – 25 trees – boxelder sensations, profussion and Robinson crabapples, Paul Scarlet hawthorns, skyline and sunburst honeylocusts, Redmond American lindens, autumn blaze and Sienna Glen maples, and aristocrat and Cleveland pears.
- Eads, \$200 matching grant – 6 trees – catalpas and boxelder sensations.
- La Junta, \$400 matching grant – 15 trees – snow crabapples, hawthorn, peach and aristocrat pears.
- Olney Springs, \$50 matching grant – 2 trees – greenshire little leaf and American lindens.
- Swink, \$200 matching grant – 5 trees – purple robe locust and piñon pine.

The total amount of soft match from these communities was 299 volunteer hours by 309 estimated volunteers, who planted trees at our community schools, baseball fields, parks and a downtown area.



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2015 Rocky Ford Beautification Project

The Rocky Ford Tree Board also applied for and received a \$2,000 CTC Planting Grant. Together with another grant and city funds, the tree board beautification project included east entrance and downtown business-area plantings and removals. The CTC grant alone garnered 17 trees planted and 188 volunteer hours from 17 volunteers, for an in-kind value of more than \$4,700.



Rocky Ford's downtown and entrance projects.

The CTC is a volunteer, non-profit 501(c)(3) organization whose mission is “leading statewide efforts to preserve, renew and enhance community forests.”



Before and after the Rocky Ford's downtown and entrance beautification projects.



2015 Ordway Parks Project

The Town of Ordway, with local tree board support, put forth a budget to plant 21 trees in Spray and Conestoga Park. Crowley County Elementary School students even celebrated by decorating “their” piñon pine with Christmas ornaments this past December. Great job, Ordway!



School program celebrating ‘their’ park tree!

Bent County Couple Recognized as Plains Tree Farmers

Bent County couple Lance and Norma Verhoeff were recognized as Plains Tree Farmers – a designation that requires them to have a forest management plan and continually manage trees and shrubs for plains forest health – at the Bent County Conservation District Annual Meeting in Las Animas, March 2015.

In the case of the Verhoeffs’ tree farm, the forest itself was created through conservation plantings. The Verhoeffs manage more than six acres of tree projects, with the first established in the early ‘60s and the last area added in 2002. Their plantings include numerous species of trees, including evergreens like Austrian, Scotch and piñon pines and deciduous trees like cottonwood, bur oak and hackberry. Their land also offers many shrubs, including lilac, Nanking cherry and wild plum.

“On the plains, management usually consists of maintaining the trees for the health and life of the project,” said Donna Davis, district forester for the CSFS La Junta District. “Outcomes here may be soil erosion and wind control, improved wildlife habitat,

energy conservation, economic values for crop or livestock protection, aesthetics and even supplemental income opportunities.”

The American Tree Farm System is a nationwide community of nearly 60,000 landowners linked by a desire to manage their woodlands and tree plantings effectively. Tree Farmers must manage at least three forested acres, and to qualify, Tree Farmers must have their forest re-inspected every five years by a Tree Farm-qualified forester. Beneficial outcomes of qualifying lands may include sustainable timber products, wildlife and recreation values, aesthetics and watershed protection.

The American Tree Farm System is run on the state level by a state Tree Farm Committee. It is a program of the American Forest Foundation, administered by the American Forest Council in Washington, D.C. Funding for the program comes from private donations and contributions from the forest products industry.

Congratulations, Lance and Norma!



Lance and Norma Verhoeff, Plains Tree Farmers.

Crowley County Couple Recognized for Fire Mitigation Efforts

Fred and Sylvia Sassone of Crowley County were recognized by the CSFS for organizing multiple community fire mitigation events in 2015. In October, Donna Davis, district forester for the CSFS La Junta District, presented the Sassones with a letter from President Obama, which was addressed to participants in the 2015 National Wildfire Community Preparedness Day.



Fred Sassone with letter from President Obama and Crowley County Commissioners Gary Gibson, Tobe Allumbaugh, and Frank Grant.

Early in 2015 the Sassones, who also are Colorado Master Volunteer Forest Stewards, applied for and received a \$500 Wildfire Community Preparedness Day Grant from the National Fire Protection Association and State Farm Insurance. The couple used the money to cover expenses for the First Free Firewise Crowley County Champion Chip Day on May 2, a wood-chipping event in which material resulting from local fire mitigation efforts or other landscaping could be brought in to the county fairgrounds and turned into mulch.

By removing the vegetation from their properties, residents were able to reduce the fuel available for wildfire near homes and other structures. Volunteers and county workers chipped the material – brush, tree limbs and other vegetative material brought in by landowners.

Enough money was left over after the May event that



Crowley County Crews and woodchipper in action.

the Sassones led fall wood-chipping events on two Saturdays in September 2015, also at the fairgrounds. The spring and fall events were supported by the CSFS, Crowley County, Town of Ordway, Crowley County Volunteer Fire Department, Master Volunteer Forest Stewards and Clean Valley Recycling.

Thank you, Fred and Sylvia!



All Wildfire Community Preparedness Day grant recipients received a banner to display with thier Prep Day projects.

‘Trees Mean Business’ Workshop in La Junta

Thirty people attended the Trees Mean Business workshop in April. The workshop was presented by the CSFS, and hosted by the City of La Junta and the La Junta Tree Board.

Trees are an essential component of vibrant downtown business districts – making dollars and “sense.” The workshop introduced strategies for creating lasting downtown tree-scapes – through tree-based, design-based, materials-based and root-based strategies. The

attendees also visited downtown streets in La Junta to get a better understanding of and participate in discussions regarding the tree improvement strategies introduced in the workshop.

Colorado Master Volunteer Forest Stewards Earn CSFS Name Tags

Our trained volunteers in southeast Colorado really make HUGE differences for our communities and rural areas. In 2015, eight students earned Colorado Master Volunteer Forest Stewards (CMVFS) name tags for volunteering 36 or more hours on tree-related activities in their communities/counties. Here's a sampling of their exciting successes:

- **Heather Craft**, La Veta Tree Board member, was the first person to receive her CSFS Master Volunteer Forest Steward name tag in Colorado. Her accomplishments since graduating from the CMVFS course include supporting the Town of La Veta Tree Board, including for Arbor Day planning and plantings with help from a fourth-grade class; nature park planning; various tree plantings and care efforts, and a landowner assist on tree selection.
- **Phyllis Adkins** works as Rocky Ford Tree Board Chair with continued enthusiasm for trees and their care. With the tree board, Phyllis just completed a highway entrances and downtown beautification project, in part using funds from a Colorado Tree Coalition grant. Rocky Ford will be receiving the Tree City USA Growth Award in 2016.



Close-up of a blue stain pine nametag.

- **Fred and Sylvia Sassone** assisted a landowner with a write-up to the Town of Sugar City; they

also finished Project Learning Tree (PLT) training and now can share the related environmental education with schools in their county. They applied for and received a National Fire Protection Association Community Wildfire Preparedness Grant for Crowley County, and held a wood chipping event at the county fairgrounds.

- **Norma Verhoeff** wrote an article for the Lamar Ledger, did several landowner assists, and supported Colorado Parks and Wildlife technicians, school teachers and a church with tree outreach.
- **Karen Wolf** helped lead the efforts for a successful Eastern Colorado Community Forestry Conference at Trinidad, and assisted with Trinidad Tree Board projects.
- **Nancy Friedman** and **Dana Barth** have done many insect and disease assists to assess trees for landowners.



Dana Barth, one of eight, receiving her CMVFS name tag from Area Forester, Dave Farmer.

Several other CMVFS past graduates work for partner agencies, several are teachers, and all are landowners who positively affect their surroundings through forest stewardship. They include:

- o Jeneen Nelson, who spurred interest in the first CMVFS course, which led to a CMVFS course in Pueblo in cooperation with the CSU Extension Pueblo office.
- o Gaynell Williams, who attended the 2014 PLT Fire Ecology Institute for educators in 2015.
- o Cody Long, who serves on the La Junta Tree Board.
- o Six other CMVFS graduates, who began Project Learning Tree courses this year!

Tree Pests, Past Weather Events Combine to Damage Elms in Southeast Colorado

2015 was a tough year for elm trees in southeast Colorado. On the heels of years of drought, which already had reduced overall tree health, they suffered from a dramatic temperature decline November 2014 – from the high seventies to well below zero in just a few days, damaging trees that had not yet gone dormant. As a result of the weather extremes, many trees declined or even died in 2015. Additionally, elm leaf beetles caused late-summer leaves on these trees to brown out, further adding to their damaged appearance.



Orange flagging from the November 2014 weather event.

Donna Davis, district forester for the CSFS La Junta District, says her office received numerous calls from homeowners and others concerned about their elms in 2015. She conveyed that elm trees and elm leaf beetles have co-existed since the trees were introduced here, but elms that lost leaves and branches as a result of past weather events weakened them and made them susceptible to significant damage from the insects in 2015.

Siberian, American and English elms all were impacted in counties including Crowley, Otero, Bent, Kiowa, Cheyenne, Prowers, Baca and Las Animas.

“Persistent drought and the fall 2014 rapid temperature drop are probably the biggest drivers of the elm decline in southeast Colorado,” said Davis. “The elm leaf beetle seemed to have a greater impact than usual, possibly because there were simply less leaves for the insects to feed on.”

Elm leaf beetles, which favor Siberian elms but can impact all elm species, can cause relatively negative effects. They feed on leaves, making them dry out and turn a brownish color as they die off. Repeated attacks can weaken trees and make even healthier ones prone to significant branch dieback.



Elm leaf beetle larvae.

In Closing

Again, thank you from the CSFS La Junta District! We are looking forward to 2016 and working with you all for the health of our natural and planted forests in southeastern Colorado!

– Donna and Teradette

For More Information:

If you have any questions or need assistance with forestry-related issues, please contact us:

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