

State of New Mexico
Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department

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News Release

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Celebrate New Mexico's Native Plants and Trees on August 18th

New Mexicans celebrate our diverse culture in many ways throughout the year. Many aspects of this unique and diverse culture revolve around our natural resources.

New Mexico's forest and watershed ecosystems span five of the 11 climate zones recognized by the United States Department of Agriculture and is home to some of the most diverse native plant species in the United States and on August 18th, 2012, this diversity will be recognized by Governor Susana Martinez as "Native Plant Day."

"Our natural resources help define us as a state and they are an important part of who we are," said New Mexico State Forestry Botany Program Coordinator Daniela Roth. "Many of our native plants face challenges in the years to come due to encroachment by non-native plants, development and drought, so we must nurture and protect them for future generations."

New Mexico State Forestry coordinates several programs that recognize and support the diverse nature of the state's native plants, including the Endangered Plant Program, the New Mexico Big Tree Register, the Forest Re-Leaf Program and the Conservation Seedling Program.

State Forestry has statutory responsibility for maintaining the State Endangered Plant Species List. Currently New Mexico has 37 native plant species that are listed endangered, including 13 federally listed species.

Funded primarily through the federal Endangered Species Act for Endangered Plant Research and Management, the Division monitors all plant species in the state for the purpose of establishing an ongoing list of endangered plant species. In this capacity the Division gathers information relating to population abundance, distribution, habitat requirements, threats, limiting factors, and other biological and ecological data to determine the status of an endangered species.

The information is used to develop conservation measures necessary for the species' survival. The Division's program promotes the conservation of listed endangered plant species through research, inventory and monitoring, law enforcement, habitat maintenance, education, and propagation.

State Forestry's staff foresters are always on the lookout for outstanding examples of the state's native trees and plants. State Forestry's New Mexico Big Tree Program recognizes such examples by tracking the largest recorded trees found throughout the state and maintaining them in a national register. There are currently 15 National Champion Big Trees located in New Mexico.

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“The Big Tree Program is a great way for the public to play a role in the conservation of our native plants and trees,” said Division Urban and Community Forester Kelly Washburn. “A lot of our State and National Big Trees were first discovered by private landowners and visitors to our public lands. By showcasing “Big Trees”, we celebrate them as symbols of diversity, resiliency, and the quality of life that we enjoy in New Mexico.”

An ecosystem sometimes overlooked in our state are urban or community forest areas. These are public parks, open space areas, school yards or any forested area within a community. New Mexico State Forestry’s Forest Re-Leaf Program was established in 1990 to provide a tree-planting grant program for public entities such as public schools, cities, towns, counties, soil and water conservation districts, rural fire districts and others.

Forest Re-Leaf fills a budgetary void for these entities that lack tree-planting funds. Since its inception, Forest Re-Leaf has awarded more than \$500,000 for tree-planting and education efforts. New Mexico State Forestry encourages incorporating and utilizing native tree and shrub species in Re-Leaf projects.

One of the Division’s most popular programs to promote the planting and conservation of native trees and plants is its Conservation Seedling Program. The program offers more than 50 low cost, native tree and shrub species to landowners, government agencies, and tribal agencies.

“By helping New Mexicans plant native trees and shrubs, we’re helping to preserve our forest legacy for generations to come,” said Conservation Seedling Forester Carol Bada. “The years of popularity this program has enjoyed shows just how much people care about trees and want to make sure they are planting trees that are native to our state.”

The seedlings are used for many different conservation purposes including reforestation, wildlife plantings, erosion control, stream bank improvement, and windbreaks. Just some of the species include ponderosa pine, native plum, golden currant, chokecherry, bristlecone pine, mountain mahogany, Rio Grande cottonwood and many more.

For information on these and the other programs that support native plants and trees in our state, log onto the Division’s website at www.nmforestry.com.

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The Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department provides resource protection and renewable energy resource development services to the public and other state agencies.

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