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(Neb.)-Boy Scouts Complete Tree Planting At Fort Robinson



By: Chris Fankhauser Posted at: 04/08/2014 08:05 AM

(Crawford)- All the roots have been planted for a northwestern Nebraska reforestation program. Now, the project has been turned over to Mother Nature.

About 1,400 members of the Boy Scouts of the Longs Peak Council and other volunteers planted 10,500 trees at Fort Robinson State Park on Saturday, the final chapter of an annual effort to reforest areas burned in a massive 1989 wildfire. The planting marked the 25th and final year for the event.

The planters were greeted with seasonably mild weather as they placed the ponderosa pine seedlings at points around the Spring Creek area on the north side of the park.

This year's effort put the 25-year total number of trees planted over 450,000. Using common survival estimates for pine seedlings, the organizers believe at least 76,000 have lived, bringing some green back to the fire's massive 48,000-acre burn scar.

The scouts and others paid tribute to the project's history throughout the weekend. The annual planting event became more successful than any of its original organizers could have imagined. Beginning in 1990 with just 300-400 hundred scouts, it was originally scheduled to last just 5-10 years. But, the popularity of the event kept it going. About \$175,000 in grants from the Nebraska Environmental Trust helped the program thrive.

Jim Schmitt of Dalton, a scout leader who organizes the effort, said the program has forged relationships and connected kids to nature. Not to mention, Fort Robinson has just been a fun place for them to be.

"We never really knew why this thing took off like it did," he said. "We know the Fort is part of the secret. Fort Robinson is a draw."

Mike Morava, Fort Robinson State Park superintendent, said the project has not only provided outdoor education and conservation opportunities to thousands of youth, but it also has positively affected the landscape of the Pine Ridge with "a lasting legacy that will be enjoyed by visitors to the park for generations to come."

Royden James of Torrington, his son Jonathan, and grandson Tyler, were given the honor of planting the project's ceremonial final tree Saturday afternoon. The Jameses began coming to the tree plant when Jonathan

was a boy, and continued into Tyler's years as a Cub Scout and now a Boy Scout. The special tree was placed along Smiley Canyon near the pines planted during the first year.

"It's great to be in that area and look at those trees again and think that we had a hand in helping get those trees, that are now 10 to 15 feet tall, in the ground," Jonathan James said. "It's great to see them established and replenishing the forest."

All the fun isn't over. Even though the tree planting is ending, Schmitt said the scouts of the Longs Peak Council will continue gathering at Fort Robinson annually in April. They will participate in other service projects around the park. Discussion also has begun about scouts helping plant trees at nearby Chadron State Park where wildfires struck in 2012.

(Story courtesy Nebraska Game & Parks)