

MONTANA

Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation



This year, one of the most compelling examples of resilience in urban forestry comes from Montana's indigenous communities. The challenges facing these communities may include a lack of reliable and essential necessities in infrastructure, internet, water, and mobile accessibility. Despite this, the passion and commitment of residents to build resilient urban forests by coming together persists. In working with the tribes, the term 'community forestry' has taken on more meaning in the sense of establishing true sustainability and resilience.

Wyola is a remote community located on the Crow Reservation in southeast Montana, just 10 miles from the Wyoming border. The community is about 80% Native American with a population of approximately 215 people. While eastern Montana is sparsely forested, the Little Bighorn River that runs nearby boasts cottonwood trees commonly over 100 feet high and native ash tree riparian draws.

The Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation Urban and Community Forestry program worked with Wyola community leaders on a tree planting project along a new walking path that focused on three main components: trees that provided cultural value;

food source and production; and shade, shelter, and protection. Additionally, the UCF program – through a Landscape Scale Restoration grant – purchased a portable Alaskan sawmill and provided training to the community group called the Mighty Few. The community now has the means and training to mill wood from their community and utilize it for essential needs such as building fencing and handicap ramps to the homes of their elders.

A stark reminder of the challenges facing remote populations is water availability. Ensuring the newly planted trees along the walking path received adequate water was another task requiring creativity and resourcefulness. Wyola recently experienced a

collapse to one of its few water wells, impacting the community center and surrounding residents. The UCF program staff, with the support of the Wyola leadership, designed a water capture system to collect rainwater from the community center building and assembled a portable water sprayer to reach the newly planted trees across the one-mile path. In its first test the system proved successful completely filling the 1,500-gallon tank after the first storm. The community was grateful to see the success and is looking to expand this type of water access to other areas for future community forestry projects.

Building relationships with tribal communities is

essential to understanding and building community resiliency. When tribal members share the cultural values, historical relevance, and knowledge of trees and plants, better planting selections can be made for trees that will provide long-term social, economic, and environmental benefits. The views shared by tribal leaders to UCF staff have changed the overall approach to assisting tribal communities. We look forward to continuing to strengthen our relationships and contributing to future generations.

[Learn more about the project.](#)

Header: Members of the Mighty Few train to use the mill saw for local wood utilization. Photo: Jamie Kirby, DNRC. **Far Left:** Lesley Kabotie and Wyola Tribal Senator Harold Male Bear on the Wyola walking path, soon to be enhanced with trees and improved accessibility. Photo: Jamie Kirby, DNRC. **Left:** DNRC contractor Lydia Hesper and Harold Male Bear Stone show the newly assembled portable water tank. Photo: Lydia Hesper, via DNRC

