

# NORTH DAKOTA

North Dakota Forest Service



Nestled in the badlands of western North Dakota, Watford City felt the pains of rapid growth during the Bakken Oil Boom. The county's population blossomed ten-fold, followed by the demand for services and infrastructure to support the workforce and new residents. Local visionaries never lost sight of the importance of green infrastructure as a vital part of the landscape.

**R**esiliency: *"the capacity to Recover from and adapt in the face of adversity, trauma, threats or stress..."*

Watford City is the hub of McKenzie County, North Dakota – an area identified by population watchdogs as the fastest-growing county in the U.S. over the past ten years (2010-2020), spurred by the Bakken Oil Boom. The tiny rural town nestled in the badlands along the western edge of the state quickly blossomed from 1,200 to more than 15,000 people. To accommodate the need for basic services, new infrastructure including roads, a high school, a medical center, a wastewater treatment facility, and a new law enforcement center, were quickly built. The North Dakota oil boom turned black gold into green for some public and private interests.

In the midst of this activity, visionary local leaders waited for the right time to soften the hardscape of construction with another type of green. In 1992, Watford City earned Tree City USA status and has

been firmly committed to planting and maintaining the community's trees.

In 2017, they hosted the State Arbor Day in celebration of the community's 25th Anniversary as a Tree City USA. The event was held in Kent Pelton Park, a living tribute to a former local educator and community leader. The park evolved from a small fishing pond to an elaborate community gathering space with a shelter and a paved walking path lined with trees. The trees featured are releases from the North Dakota State University (NDSU) Woody Plant Improvement Program, showcasing the diversity of trees that can withstand the harsh elements of the Northern Plains, including Dakota Pinnacle® birch, Prairie Horizon® alder, 'Prairie Cascade' willow, Prairie Torch® buckeye, and Prairie Expedition® elm.

In 2022, Watford City implemented an EAB (emerald ash borer) Preparedness and Readiness Plan, funded as a USDA

Forest Service Urban Priority Project. The project enabled the community to remove declining ash trees from streets and in parks where green ash dominates the palette, replacing them with a diverse mix of tree species.

Although EAB has not yet been detected in the state, an updated tree ordinance widens the regulatory umbrella so EAB and future invasive pests can be managed in a sustainable manner. The [North Dakota Community Tree Inventory/Planning Tool](#) (ND TIP Tool), a Landscape Scale Restoration (LSR) funded online statewide tree inventory and planning tool, is used to update the city's tree inventory as changes are implemented.

While the area's economic growth has slowed down, Watford City's community forest continues to grow. There's a resilient shade of green on the McKenzie County landscape.



**Header:** Northern-hardy NDSU tree selections grow along the walking path in the Nature Park. Photo: Gerri Makay, NDFS. **Top:** Colorful mural on a downtown building depicts the beautiful McKenzie County badlands landscape. Photo: Joel Allen, NDFS. **Bottom:** Sign in new Nature Park, a tribute to the local educator and civic leader that inspired the outdoor community space. Photo: Gerri Makay, NDFS