

KANSAS

KANSAS FOREST SERVICE

Over the years, the state of Kansas has experienced the impacts of insects and disease, and has been hit hard with several major storms and severe weather events. As a result, community partners recognized the need for an active organization to help conserve and protect forests in the Kansas City metro area. The Kansas Forest Service (KFS) played an instrumental role in the formation of a nonprofit organization focused on providing tree care education to the community while also advocating for healthy urban and community forests.

After a severe ice storm in the Kansas City metropolitan area in 2002, a group of partners, from corporate, state (including KFS and Missouri Department of Conservation), organizational, and nonprofits, created the “Right Tree in the Right Place Coalition” to disseminate proper tree care information via broadcast, print, and electronic media sources to the multitudes of people who were affected by the storm. Over time, it became clear that it wasn’t enough to just provide information, it was time to create a nonprofit forestry organization that could provide service to metro communities, teach residents how to properly plant and care for trees, and advocate for a healthy community forest.

In 2005, Heartland Tree Alliance (HTA), an affiliate of Bridging the Gap, emerged to fill that need. In the years since, HTA volunteers have donated 13,000+ hours of time, enabling HTA to plant 17,874 trees, prune 3,264, and provide maintenance by mulching or removing tree stakes to another 2,527 trees. 275 people have completed HTA’s TreeKeeper course that trains city and county staff, Master Gardeners, Master Naturalists, tree board members, and metro residents on proper tree planting, pruning, maintenance, identification and the importance of the community forest. Fittingly enough, HTA’s motto is “Healthy People Need Healthy Trees”.



Trained Heartland Tree Alliance volunteers prune young park trees. Photo Credit: Heartland Tree Alliance.



Participants in HTA’s TreeKeeper course learn how to identify trees, properly plant, prune, and maintain trees, and recognize biotic and abiotic problems. Photo Credit: Lynn Loughary.

Now led by a steering committee and three full-time employees, HTA trains and engages volunteers that help cities plant, prune, mulch, and otherwise care for young trees. To ensure they are properly trained, volunteers either attend a TreeKeeper course held in Missouri and Kansas each year or attend a workday where they first receive training before joining other volunteers to perform the identified tasks.

Bi-state support was critical in the formation and development of HTA, but perseverance and diverse funding opportunities put HTA on solid footing for long term program implementation and success. HTA has been a partner in two Kansas Landscape Scale Restoration grants, one to combat the spread of the Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) in Kansas, and another in FY18 when the KFS and HTA utilize community-based programs to combat canopy loss in metro Kansas City. As a result of the relationship developed with the city during the EAB grant, HTA has successfully replicated their street tree planting program from Kansas City, MO to Prairie Village, KS.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Kansas Forest Service, Community Forestry Program
http://www.kansasforests.org/community_forestry