



FEDERAL FUNDING ENHANCES RURAL FORESTRY EFFORTS

Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) and Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funding has been critical in Nebraska for improving local community forestry programs and providing better service to rural communities.

In June 2024, Nebraska Forest Service (NFS) staff converged to conduct a tree inventory in the western Nebraska town of Curtis, population 839. Knowing what, where, and condition of community trees helps municipalities make data-driven management decisions to ensure trees are around for the future. IIJA provides critical funding to better serve rural parts of Nebraska through two full-time positions stationed in western and central Nebraska. Through this additional capacity, NFS has completed numerous tree inventories, improved program delivery for the Free Trees for Fall Planting program, and provided timely technical assistance. Without IIJA funding, the high level of technical assistance communities receive wouldn't be possible.

Furthermore, IIJA funding has allowed NFS to hire a summer intern, Clara Walstad, from the University of Nebraska's Community and Regional Forestry Program to assist with program implementation. One of her projects

has been helping Crete, Nebraska by providing an inventory of park trees.

"I enjoy honing my tree ID skills and learning alongside foresters and parks staff."

Clara Walstad
NFS Intern

Ultimately, the inventory will help set Crete up for its IRA funding and become a Nebraska Statewide Arboretum (NSA) Affiliated Arboretum site.

IRA funding is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for Nebraska's communities to improve their community forestry through no-match funding. Between storms, drought, tree age, and Emerald Ash Borer, there is a backlog of expensive tree removal and replacement needs. IRA helps address this need and expand local community forestry programs. NFS received \$1.875 million in IRA funding for distribution to Nebraska communities. In addition, the USDA

Forest Service awarded \$1 million to South Sioux City and \$10 million to the NSA. Thus far, NFS awarded \$1.54 million to eleven large communities for community forestry projects in rural areas. Twenty-five applicants from small communities, less than 8,000 people, requested over \$430,000. NFS and NSA collaborated to expand the initial funding pool and ensure all qualifying applicants received IRA dollars without the burden of submitting another application. Recipients will start projects in the fall of 2024.

Header Left: For Clara Walstad, NFS intern, helping Crete with their inventory is one way she is learning while helping trees and communities thrive. Photo: Graham Herbst. **Header Right:** Kaden Vowers, Assistance Community Forester, helps with a tree inventory in western Nebraska. IIJA funding has improved service to rural communities. Photo: Chrissy Land