

NEW MEXICO

New Mexico State Forestry

Shade trees, including many invasive Siberian elms, were actively planted in New Mexico's plazas, parks, courtyards, and streets during the New Deal era of the 1930s. Many of these trees are now over-mature and rapidly declining, and New Mexico faces an impending loss of their significant cultural, environmental, aesthetic, and economic contributions. Through a USDA Forest Service grant, New Mexico State Forestry (NMSF) is working with communities large and small statewide to develop management approaches to transition New Mexico's community forests into a future healthy state.

Carrizozo, New Mexico is not far from the geographical center of the state and, in 1899, it became a major railroad terminal point with a large ice plant. A booming town popped up in the middle of the grasslands, and Carrizozo became the Lincoln County seat. Carrizozo was well poised in the 1930s to accept New Deal era funds. Among the many projects undertaken during that time, Carrizozo built McDonald Park as a gathering point and planted the park and lined the Main Street with Siberian elms.



Lincoln County courthouse, c. 1940.
Photo Credit: www.courthousehistory.com



Siberian elms in front of the former Carrizozo Ice Plant. Photo Credit: Jennifer Dann, NMSF

Today, Carrizozo struggles to remain economically strong. The interstate highway system crisscrosses New Mexico but bypasses Carrizozo in both directions by a great distance. The few trains that still come by no longer stop, and the old ice plant is now a museum. Yet many of the Siberian elms remain, despite infrequent water and often extreme winds. McDonald Park, once a symbol of New Deal era prosperity, now contains severely degraded trees.

Carrizozo's situation is the same in many New Mexico community forests, where the combination of railroad access and free tree giveaways resulted in an enormous number of trees planted in communities that had no resources to maintain them in their old age. Even the bigger, more prosperous communities struggle with the volume of trees planted during this time. Because of this, New Mexico is now facing the impending loss of the trees' significant cultural, environmental, aesthetic, and economic contributions.



McDonald Park, Carrizozo, NM. Photo Credit: Town of Carrizozo



Tree assessment with community members in Carrizozo, McDonald Park, and Inventoried Tree Locations. Photo Credits: Amy Bell, Groundwork Studio/Plant Geo Tree Plotter application

NMSF received a USDA Forest Service Landscape Scale Restoration (LSR) grant to begin to tackle the problem statewide. The effort began with the Urban and Community Forestry program, which has inventoried trees across the state in New Deal era funded locations, assessing their condition and developing management recommendations. (Following the inventory in Carrizozo, NMSF was able to issue an additional community forestry assistance sub-grant to fund a small tree pruning and removal effort to help the town.)

Now, NMSF is working with other state organizations to try to address long-term solutions for Carrizozo and other New Mexico communities. The next phase of the LSR project is to communicate risk issues to funders and decision makers and collaboratively develop comprehensive community forest management approaches. Together, NMSF hopes to transition New Mexico's New Deal era community forest into a future healthy state.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

New Mexico State Forestry
Urban and Community Forestry Program
<http://www.emnrd.state.nm.us/SFD/CommunityFor/Community.html>