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Nonprofit digs in to revive greenbelt in Wheat Ridge

Revive the Greenbelt tree planting event set for April 27

Posted: 04/16/2013 03:26:47 PM MDT Updated: 04/16/2013 03:26:48 PM MDT Author: Emilie Rusch

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About the Author



Emilie Rusch
E-Mail: erusch@denverpost.com

When a storm toppled hundreds of trees in Wheat Ridge's greenbelt in 2009, the city replanted hundreds more.

Despite the city's best effort, only 20 percent of the new trees took root initially, said Margaret Paget, the city's forestry and open space supervisor. Even more have died since then.

This Arbor Day, the city is joining forces with a Denver-based nonprofit organization in hopes of finally reviving the popular open space along Clear Creek.

The Institute for Environmental Solutions is seeking about 100 volunteers to plant nearly 200 trees and shrubs April 27 along the greenbelt near Prospect Park. Individuals and groups are also being sought to serve as "tree stewards" and tend to the new plantings until they are established, all part of a new effort called "Revive the Greenbelt!"

"The greenbelt is such a community asset," Paget said. "If the community could come together to help establish it, it will have payoff and rewards well into the future — with the life of a tree being at least 100 years if they really get established and going."

The epicenter of Revive the Greenbelt is an area along Clear Creek just south of Prospect Park that took the brunt of a 2009 hailstorm, a "microburst" that destroyed trees and canopy cover, said Michael Haney, project manager for the Institute for Environmental Solutions.

The nonprofit has been working with the city and stakeholders for the last eight months, studying the area to determine which species would be most likely to survive, where best to plant and how to increase survival rates given the area's conditions, he said. Prospect Lake used to be a rock quarry and the creek's banks are heavily incised in some areas.

"We don't just plant trees to plant trees," Haney said. "We're doing it in a very scientific way."

The goal of the pilot program, he said, is to have a 65 percent survival rate after three years.

"Even the worst possible conditions, in a former rock quarry, you can still reestablish trees," Haney said.

The Denver Urban Drainage and Flood Control District, Xcel Energy, Colorado State Forest Service Urban Waters Partnership, Colorado Tree Coalition, Wells Fargo and Confluent Design donated to the project.

About 100 volunteers will plant 192 trees and shrubs on April 27. Just as important, though, is the second phase of the project, the Wheat Ridge Tree Stewards Program, Haney said.



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Under the program, community volunteer groups will assist city staff and volunteers from the nonprofit in watering and monitoring the new plantings, he said.

Paget said the Tree Stewards will be a big help for a city department already “stretched thin” and responsible for maintaining 10,000 trees — not including ones in the greenbelt.

“You can’t just put a tree in the ground. It requires nurturing and watering,” Paget said. “If we go into a drought or have a hot, dry time this summer, it’s going to take water to keep them going.

“That’s the key,” she said.

Revive the Greenbelt!

What: Tree and shrub planting

When: 9 a.m.-1 p.m. April 27

Where: Prospect Park, West 44th Avenue and Robb Street, Wheat Ridge

Register: Sign up in advance by e-mailing solutions@i4es.org.

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