

Taking care of Taos trees helps community flourish

Taos Tree Board prepares action plan to care for nearly 6,000 public trees

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From left: Taos Mayor Dan Barrone helps students D. Garcia and J. Medina plant a fruit tree in the Taos High School orchard in 2018. Tree plantings are among the goals of the volunteer Taos Tree Board, which has tallied close to 6,000 trees in Taos public spaces.

Taos trees bear witness to the town's history.

A more than century-old black willow near the center of Taos is a national champion based on its massive girth and height.

A cottonwood on the Taos Plaza finally had to be taken down after shading dancers, lovers and loungers for 100 years.

Beginning in 1890, Taoseños planted a variety of trees along the acequia and near the plaza, along roads and near adobe homes. They grew, alongside generations of Taos families.

Now those are among nearly 6,000 trees documented by the Taos Tree Board in town parks, historic district and other public places. The survey took three years to complete. The survey "gives us a picture of what condition [the trees are] in, where

they're located and how to care for them a little bit better," said Paul Bryan Jones, one of the Taos Tree Board founders and a longtime certified arborist.

The tree board – made up of certified arborists, students, landscape architects and more – spent the last three years counting all the community's trees.

They've drafted a plan detailing how the community can take care of Taos trees and help plant the next generation of saplings to keep Taos shady, even through climate change. "We're in the last stage of our tree-management plan," said Jones.

The 29-page plan must still be presented to the town of Taos council for approval.

The plan is one of many projects the Taos Tree Board has undertaken, along with planting new trees, training the next generation of arborists and teaching students about urban forests.

"We became a Tree City USA in 2010," Jones said. "Part of that is to have an active tree board."

They've garnered several grants in the last seven years, launching education programs, planting more than 300 saplings, offering an arborist certification class and conducting the tree survey.

Each tree board member has different reasons for volunteering. Felix Banuelos, also a certified arborist, said, "I want to plant trees for the future of Taos. You see a lot of trees getting older and you don't see a lot of the next generation coming in. That really bothered me."

Joan Pond remembers many of the town's trees when they were still saplings. She believes trees can bring people together. "Some of us have been talking about the loss of community. I think trees are a way to connect the community," Pond said.

The board also is thinking about climate change and how that will impact the town's urban forest.

The final Tree Care Plan will have a recommended list of trees for the Taos area, ones that might better deal with less water, changing temperatures and colder weather. "We're looking at species that are real resilient," Jones said.

Cottonwoods are one such tree, good at storing up water in a good year and then surviving a few drought years. "They have massive water storage," Jones said.

The Taos Tree Board is continuing to work on a Tree City USA application and on plans for a big Arbor Day celebration April 26. The board meets once a month. The public is always welcome to participate.

Follow the Taos Tree Board on Facebook.