

White County SWCD Participates in Statewide Tree Planting Project

Potential Sites and Partners for 2024 Projects Being Sought

Illinois Extension 4-H and the Association of Illinois Soil and Water Conservation Districts (AISWCD) Forestry Committee have partnered to plant Oak trees. To build on the Extension 4-H Green Communities Tree Program, funding partners were sought and volunteers from across the state were recruited. After a successful 2022 planting campaign across 31 Illinois Soil and Water Conservation Districts, the Spring 2023 planting will include 38 Illinois counties; from Winnebago in the north to Massac in the south and Edgar on the east to Adams on the west. Funding for the two years of tree planting was provided by Illinois Forestry Development Council, University of Illinois Extension Foundation and AISWCD. The statewide tree planting initiative is coordinated at the local level by Extension 4-H, and the local Soil and Water Conservation District. Each participating District is supplied with 25 Oak trees to be planted on a public site within the District. White County SWCD is one of this year's 38 statewide participants. A total of 950 four-foot-tall potted Oak trees supplied by Forrest Keeling Nursery of Elsberry, Missouri will be planted this spring.

Throughout Illinois and the Midwest, Oak forests are diminishing and being overtaken by less desirable Beech and Maple. It is projected that some Illinois Oak/Hickory forests particularly in southwest Illinois, will be completely overtaken by Beech and Maple by 2050 if management practices aren't soon initiated. The emphasis of this partnership tree planting project is to raise awareness of our diminishing Oak forests and to educate youth and community members on the value of native Oak forests and Oak trees to Illinois. Each participating SWCD will receive 10 White Oak, 10 Red Oak, and 5 Bur Oak with the goal of creating "mini" Oak savannas across the state. The actual planting of the Oak savannas is being done by local 4-H members and volunteers. White County SWCD chose Burrell Park near Carmi as their planting site on April 11, 2023. Several 4-H members and parents joined Amy McCarty, U of I Extension; Anne Krippenstapel, Forestry; Carmi Mayor Jeff Pollard and Holly Healy; Casey Calvert, landowner volunteer; and White County SWCD Administrative Coordinator, Jewel Brooks, and new Resource Conservationist, Heidi Uselton, to plant and mulch the Oaks and install shelters to protect each tree. The site at Burrell Park was selected in consultation with Mayor Jeff Pollard, to enhance an open area near the tent campground.

Please contact the White County SWCD if interested in participating in 2024 projects or have a potential site to discuss. Participant selection is on a first-come, first-served basis at the State level.