

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR RURAL NORTH DAKOTA COMMUNITIES

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The North Dakota Forest Service (NDFS) is committed to helping communities develop long-term sustainability. This is accomplished through state and private forestry programs and through the cooperation of federal and state partners.

The NDFS has partnered with USDA-Forest Service, Dakota Prairie Grasslands to deliver Economic Action programs aimed at helping natural-resource dependent communities become more self-sufficient. One such program is the Rural Community Assistance (RCA) program. RCA strives to integrate economic development through economic diversity, community development, and natural resource conservation activities. In 2002, six North Dakota locations (Bowdon, Cooperstown, Hazen, St. John, Valley City, and Williams County) were awarded \$80,000 for recreation, eco-tourism, and community development activities. In addition, nearly \$30,000 was awarded to the communities of South Heart, Scranton, Lidgerwood, Arthur, Carrington JDA, and St. John for the development of strategic action plans. The Division of Community Services (DCS) – part of the ND Department of Commerce – was brought on board as a major partner to assist in these efforts. DCS contributed this year by funding a majority of the action plan projects. DCS utilizes tools developed through the Leadership Initiative for Community Strategic Planning to help communities meet today's challenges.

As a result of the National Fire Plan, Congress provided increased funding assistance to states. The focus of much of the additional funding was mitigating risk in the wildland-urban interface (WUI) and those communities that were affected by the catastrophic 2000 fire season. In 2002, \$75,000 in funding was made available to North Dakota communities for projects addressing hazardous fuel reduction, information and education in the wildland-urban interface, and homeowner and community action. An additional \$30,000 was allocated for firewise landscaping demonstration projects around communities or incorporated into existing community windbreaks.

Since 1991, the America the Beautiful (ATB) program has provided funding as part of the Forestry Title of the 1990 Farm Bill. In North Dakota, over 200 tree planting and program development projects utilizing nearly \$700,000 in grant funds have been completed.

In 1994, the Community Transportation Enhancement (CTE) program was made available with funds administered by the North Dakota Department of Transportation. These projects are meant to enhance community transportation corridors through the planting of trees and shrubs. To date, a total of 191 projects have been funded with \$987,000 in grant awards.

The Family Forest grant program was initiated in 1996 as part of the North Dakota Centennial Trees program. Funding is provided via the Trees for North Dakota Trust Fund, supported by voluntary contributions received from North Dakota individual income tax returns and other private donations. Over 150 tree planting projects have been completed across the state through this program.

Communities use available community forestry grants as a foundation for success. Tree planting projects are often a unifying effort, and an immediate source of community pride. These modest tree planting successes often lead to broader community-based projects. In this time of struggling rural towns, forestry projects can help empower communities and lead them down the path toward a bright sustainable future.