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NEWS

For Immediate Release

October 30, 2013

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More than 10,000 trees planted in Track Fire burn area

TRINIDAD, Colo. – This month, the Colorado State Forest Service has nearly completed a year-long project to plant more than 10,000 trees on land burned by the 2011 Track Fire. The seedling trees, grown at the CSFS Nursery in Fort Collins, were planted primarily at Lake Dorothea State Wildlife Area, in southern Las Animas County.

The Track Fire had caused a high degree of tree mortality in the wildlife area. Early restoration efforts in the watershed centered on stream bank stabilization and erosion control efforts, and shrub species like Gambel oak and New Mexico locust began regenerating naturally – providing necessary soil stabilization on hillsides. However, these shrubs were soon going to also dominate even those areas where ponderosa pine forests existed previously.

“The outlook for natural pine regeneration here was dim, due to high overstory mortality and destruction of on-site seed sources. Thanks to the substantial grant funding we received and generous volunteer efforts, we now have healthy pines planted alongside the other regrowth,” said Mark Loveall, assistant district forester for the CSFS La Veta District.

Funding for the seedlings, which were mostly ponderosa pine but included some Douglas-fir, came from a Colorado State University, Warner College of Natural Resources Mini-Grant and a City of Raton Water Trust Board Grant.

Volunteer labor, led by the CSFS La Veta District, was responsible for most of the planting efforts. Volunteer groups who assisted with planting efforts included high school students in the Upward Bound Program; work crews from Raton 4-H, FFA and Raton High School; and members of the CSFS Volunteer Program. All but 300 of these seedlings have now gone into the ground. Loveall says the remainder will be planted in the near future.

All the trees were planted in the Sugarite Canyon Watershed, which is mostly owned by the City of Raton, N.M., and serves its municipal water needs. The portion the city owns within Colorado encompasses nearly 6,000 acres, leased by the Colorado Division of Parks and Wildlife for recreation activities including hunting, fishing and hiking. Approximately 8,000 of the seedlings were planted in Colorado, in Lake Dorothea SWA, with the other seedlings planted on adjacent lands in New Mexico within the same watershed.

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Loveall says the CSFS will be tracking survival rates for many of the seedlings, to make comparisons based on planting date, aspect and site preparation to optimize success rates with future plantings.

The CSFS seedling tree program was established to encourage Colorado farmers, ranchers and rural landowners to plant seedling trees for conservation purposes. To purchase seedling trees from the CSFS Nursery, landowners must use the seedlings for conservation purposes, purchase minimums of 30 to 50 seedlings and agree not to use them for landscaping or resale as seedlings.

More information about the CSFS seedling tree program is available at local CSFS district offices and at <http://csfs.colostate.edu>.

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