

Missoulian

City plants almost 190 trees around Missoula

By KEILA SZPALLER of the Missoulian | Posted: Monday, July 25, 2011 5:45 am

The city of Missoula planted 189 new trees this year, paid for partly with money the Missoula City Council set aside.

"I think we should be at a net gain this year, but a lot of trees have come out," Parks and Recreation Department director Donna Gaukler said Friday.

Later this year, Parks and Rec will compile tree data and share the number of plantings and removals with the council and members of the public. In the meantime, to make sure the saplings grow strong, Gaukler reminded people to water their newly planted boulevard trees with a hose running at a slow trickle now that the weather is hot.

Last year, the city adopted a parks district - or parks tax - for the first time. The assessment pulled in an estimated \$200,000 for parks, and the council reserved \$40,000 for trees. Some \$30,000 is going to pruning and removing hazardous trees, and \$10,000 went to buying new trees. In addition, the urban forestry general fund put \$8,000 toward the new trees.

Among the younger members of the urban forest are Kentucky coffee trees, bur oak, Canada red chokecherry, Ohio buckeye, black walnut, autumn blaze pear, ponderosa pine, western larch and thornless hawthorn, according to the 2011 tree planting plan from Parks and Rec.

Councilwoman Marilyn Marler, chairwoman of the Conservation Committee, said it's hard to gauge whether the entire program has been successful because the crew is still in the thick of the season. She said fall will be a better time to evaluate the work, but the department has a lot of ground to cover.

"It's such a huge job at this point because it's been underfunded," Marler said. "It's asking a lot of the forestry department to do a good job with the resources that they have."

The forestry crew is part of Parks and Rec. Gaukler said the city has the resources to prune each tree every 40 years or so, but the industry standard is to prune every five to seven years.

Nonetheless, the money the council carved out for trees made a dent - "we did a good chunk of catch-up." Plus, more and more citizens are calling parks about the trees in their boulevards.

"Finally, the city can do something about the boulevard trees," Gaukler said is the sentiment from many residents.

The department isn't responsible for trees in people's yards.

Trees were planted by June 30 to avoid any heat waves, Gaukler said. The new trees are in place of ones that have been removed, in response to citizen requests, as part of memorials and to improve underserved neighborhoods.

"The North Side, West Side and Franklin to the Fort areas were selected due to low tree density," reads the 2011 tree plan.

The council set aside the same portion of parks district money for the current fiscal year, which started July 1. The ultimate goal is to have a mix of ages instead of a crop of old trees and a stand of young ones, Gaukler said.

But she also said safety comes first, and that means pruning and removal, too.

"We love to plant trees for sure, but our first concern is the safety of citizens who are walking and driving under those trees," Gaukler said.

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