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November 20, 2023

New Mexico Reforestation Center Receives Permanent Home in Mora

New seedling nursery and research center to scale up production to 5 million seedlings per year

Santa Fe – New Mexico is taking a major step in the critical process of restoring forests that have been devastated by wildfires and impacted by climate change by identifying a site for constructing a new reforestation center.

Earlier this month, the New Mexico Reforestation Center Board chose the site of the current John T. Harrington (JTH) Forestry Research Center in Mora as the home for the new facility.

The board reviewed multiple locations before deciding that the Mora site met the majority of its criteria for building a modern reforestation center. This selection will make northern New Mexico a hub for reforestation efforts not just in New Mexico, but across the southwest.

Restoration and Reforestation

New Mexico continues to experience hot and dry summers, making our forests more susceptible to year-round fire. Over the past twenty years, wildfires have burned over 5.45 million acres across the state. Due to the high heat and intensity of many of these fires – such as 2022’s Hermits Peak/Calf Canyon fire – forests simply aren’t growing back on their own and the regrowth is brush and shrubs, not trees.

“High severity fires aren’t going away,” said Dr. Matt Hurteau, UNM Professor of Biology. “But when you look at forests with ponderosa pine and Douglas fir – those trees *are* going away. Planting the right tree in the right place is the only way to help regenerate forests after a high severity fire.”

The Center

The New Mexico Reforestation Center (NMRC) is a collaboration between the New Mexico Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department's [Forestry Division](#), New Mexico Highlands University, New Mexico State University, and the University of New Mexico.

The Center is focused on growing and planting seedlings that will withstand the hotter, drier climate we find ourselves in. The importance of achieving this goal today will be even more critical twenty years from now. Currently, New Mexico needs to plant between 1 million to 2.6 million acres of trees, which will require 150 to 390 million seedlings.

“What reforestation really means is that in two or three decades our children will reap the benefits of decisions we made today,” said Rachael Foe, Forestry Division's Reforestation Coordinator. “We are purposefully investing not just in the forests themselves, but in the water sources and wildlife habitat they provide.”

After all, it's not only about trees. New Mexico's forests supply 50-70% of all water used by municipalities and agriculture in the state. In addition to this critical resource, reforestation efforts will also help maintain recreational opportunities, wildlife habitat, and timber resources.

Initially, NMRC will scale-up production of tree seedlings to meet the tremendous need in New Mexico and across the Southwest to reforest burned areas. The Center will address tree seed collection, nursery production, seedling planting, and monitoring of tree seedling survival. Once completed, the new facility will produce up to 5 million seedlings per year. This is an over 1,500 percent increase from the current annual capacity of approximately 300,000 seedlings.

The Center will include greenhouses, a seed bank, and support facilities from seed processing to shipping, and office space. It will also continue the JTH Center's work in growing seedlings that are “drought-stressed” in the nursery to increase their survival in the harsh burned area environment.

The Center will also support workforce development, forest-based economic growth and valuable ecosystem services throughout New Mexico. A comprehensive economic analysis concluded the Center would support 474 jobs per year and generate \$1.25 billion in economic impacts over a 30-year period.

“We couldn't be more pleased with the site selection for the New Mexico Reforestation Center,” said Jay Gogue, Interim President, NMSU. “The Mora location assures a close connection to a community in need of reforestation after the Hermits Peak/Calf Canyon Fire, as well as the JTH Center staff's built-in knowledge base to ramp-up our efforts.”

In addition to the Mora site, ancillary facilities will be designed for New Mexico Highlands University, in Las Vegas. They will include the seed processing area, a backup seed bank, academic training, and student and workforce development for the program.

“Highlands is excited to grow our investment in reforestation with staff working on site here in Las Vegas,” said NMHU President Sam Minner. “This growth fits neatly with NMHU’s Forestry degree program and expertise in seed collection and processing.”

Next Steps

The selection of the Mora location is just the first of several steps to get reforestation capacity scaled up in this state. Next phases will include design, construction, staffing and workforce development.

Towards this ongoing effort, the USDA Forest Service is supporting post wildfire recovery and reforestation with a \$10 million downpayment on the center’s construction to New Mexico State University. “That the federal funding will be invested in Mora is fitting, given the impact of the Hermits Peak and Calf Canyon Fire,” said Laura McCarthy, State Forester.

“The New Mexico Reforestation Center represents an absolutely critical investment in the forests of our future. This is a generational effort that New Mexico is leading,” said Sarah Cottrell Propst, EMNRD Cabinet Secretary.

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