

One, two trees: Urban forest counters often mistaken for tree removers

By LAURA URSENY-Staff Writer

Article Launched: 08/24/2008 12:00:00 AMPDT

CHICO — With one clad in an orange vest and the other's colored green, the last thing that Scott Gregory and Joel Memmer want to be taken for are guys trying to remove trees.

They're actually doing the opposite. Traveling around in a bulbous electric vehicle, the men are inventorying and evaluating all of Chico's street trees so that the leafy assets can live longer and in better shape.

Working separately, the two men make their way up and down city streets, through residential and commercial pockets alike, looking at each tree the city owns. On Thursday, they were working on and off The Esplanade, in the Sixth Avenue area.

They have been mistaken by the public for a team marking trees destined to be cut. Strangely, the public reaction has either been outrage or glee.

"Yes, some people want those street trees taken out," says Chico urban forester Denice Britton. "Some people don't like them."

Britton is supervising the pair, whose paychecks are coming from a California Department of Forestry grant of \$55,000 to update Chico's urban forest information.

First, the men determine whether a tree is city-owned. City trees are within 10 to 15 feet from the curb, depending on their location in Chico.

Once that's determined, the type is identified. It's

measured in girth and height, and checked with the city's current inventory for its last maintenance. If it's not noted, it's added to the inventory. If there is a history, the tree's "vigor rating," or rate of growth, is compared.

Each man uses a hand-held global positioning system device that helps them locate the latitude and longitude of each tree they examine. That GPS device also records information collected.

Eyeing bark, trunk, branches and leaves, they determine if there's any problem with the tree, such as an insect infestation or disease, or if pruning is needed.

Gregory is a graduate student at Chico State University in geography, and has been working on a project to determine Chico urban forest's ability to handle carbon.

Memmer recently graduated with a degree in geography.

Britton provided their tree-related training before the inventory began.

"We've needed to do this for quite a while," said Britton, who's focusing first on The Esplanade because of the large trees, and then on areas the city has newly annexed.

A tree inventory has already been done on most of the city trees, but that was more than 10 years ago.

At present, Chico is home to roughly 35,000 street trees, which don't include trees in parks or on private property.

And, Britton thinks there could be another 6,000 street trees in the annexed areas the team is counting.

Advertisement

A bright idea in online advertising.
PrinterStitial® ads by Format Dynamics.

FormatDynamics®

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™

ChicoER.com

Putting in an eight- to nine-hour day, the men's goal is 100 trees a day. But sometimes time is taken up by chatting with residents or passers-by, who want to know what they're doing. They also carry city-issued business cards for a follow-up call.

"People are really protective of their trees," said Memmer.

Behind all the initial work is Britton's goal to change the way Chico takes care of its street trees.

For a long time, the city didn't perform any regular maintenance or pruning. It only responded to emergency calls from residents or cleaning up after storms.

Then it developed a systematic way to take care of trees, block by block. But because of the overwhelming number of trees and its small, seven-member staff, the process has been extremely slow, Britton said.

Britton explained that on the "service request" system, the crew would bounce from block to block, only working on a couple of trees. Tackling a block of trees saves time.

"My goal is to reduce the number of calls the city gets about trees," Britton said.

Getting into a routine maintenance circuit will save the city money and time, as well as providing for healthier trees.

"We're trying to get on a 10- to 15-year cycle, so that a tree gets attention every 10 to 15 years," Britton said. "Most cities have a five- to 10-year cycle. We'd like to work toward that."

The state grant also allows the city to purchase a laptop computer, so when the street tree crew goes

out to maintain a tree, the inventory update can be done on location.

Ultimately, Britton wants to produce a brochure featuring a walking tour of the avenues that includes some of the very large, nicely shaped or unusual tree species.

The Chico Chamber of Commerce, the Avenues Association and the city will be distributing the brochure and map when it's finished.

Staff writer Laura Urseny can be reached at 896-7756 or lurseny@chicoer.com.

Advertisement



A bright idea in online advertising.
PrinterStitial® ads by Format Dynamics.

FormatDynamics®

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™