

Million Tree Update, July 2010

The three planting sites undertaken by the Million Tree Project were evaluated again this season. The Summers of 2008 and 2009, which were both nearly 15 inches behind normal in rainfall, took their toll on our previous plantings. At the highway 14 sites we are lucky to have about 10% survival of the plantings we undertook. Two species, hackberry and basswood seem to have the best survival rate, something to consider when planning future plantings. The highway 90 site planted last year has about a 60% survival rate, likely due to more plentiful rainfall this spring, however as of this posting we are already four inches behind on precipitation for the year. The question now is how best to proceed.

Planting seedlings in the way we have done in the past can be successful, but we are at the mercy of irregular rainfall and water experts believe we are still in a drought cycle, in spite of recent rains. We could plant larger trees but they will not survive without regular waterings, especially during the first year, and planting locations make hauling water to trees unfeasible. If sites are simply left alone and un-mowed, seeds, carried on the wind will germinate and slowly begin the reforestation process beginning with weed trees like box elder. That approach would require volunteers to provide mid-summer thistle control at a time when few volunteers are available. We are still evaluating how best to move forward.

This fall, with the cooperation and contributions from the Minnesota Vikings and others we hope to attempt a fall planting of larger trees at the sites of Habitat for Humanity homes in the Mankato area.