

# District replaces trees, enhances cultural diversity



Employees with Huntington District and West Virginia Natural Resources Conservation Service work together to plant trees along the Kanawha River near Marmet Locks and Dam in Belle, W.Va. (Photo by Chuck Minsker)

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By Chuck Minsker  
Huntington District

The construction of a new lock extension project at the Marmet Locks and Dam in Belle, W.Va., took six years and more than \$400 million to accomplish.

As a result, the Huntington District U.S. Army Corps of Engineers had to acquire 98 acres and move a literal mountain of earth. In the process, hundreds of trees were removed.

Now that the major construction is completed, work is under way to bring back the plant life that once thrived along the riverbank - and special effort has gone into ensuring that the replacements are closely related to the original plants.

"Trees were harvested on site at a wooded tract at the north end of the project prior to construction. Small trees, some sprouts and cuttings were taken off site to a plant propagation center at Alderson, W.Va., where they grew and multiplied those plants for us during the seven years of construction," said Mike Keathley, project manager.

The original project design included the plan to preserve those native plants with the intent of reintroducing them to the site following construction.

The objective was to maintain the cultural diversity of the site that existed prior to construction, including the types of species present.

"We wanted to include trees that were acclimated to that environment," Keathley said.

"We've returned those plant materials to the site and through our partnership with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) have reintroduced that component of our total mitigation replanting for the site."

As a result of the effort, more than a thousand trees have already been put in place - some planted by the contractor that handled the construction, Kokosing/Fru-Con, and some by Corps employees and workers with NRCS.

The placement of the trees has been designed to keep the plants in harmony with the residents and the river. "At the upstream end of the project, adjacent to the residential area, the original plan was that the trees would just be randomly planted over that ground between the government boundary and the riverbank," Keathley said.

"The residents were concerned that they wouldn't be able to see the river. In response to that public concern, we revisited our planting plan and clustered those trees into little 'islands,' so even though there might be an island of trees behind the resident's property, they could look upstream or downstream and have viewing lanes to the river," he said.

The planting effort will continue into the months ahead as a variety of trees take root and grow in their new home in the shadow of the locks along the Kanawha River.

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## Article Attachments