

IOWA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

LEADING IOWANS IN CARING FOR OUR NATURAL RESOURCES

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State Forest Nursery Assessment Q&A

- 1. What is the State Forest Nursery?** The State Forest Nursery is part of the DNR Forestry Bureau. The State Forest Nursery provides locally sourced conservation tree and shrub seedling stock to Iowa landowners for reforestation, wildlife habitat, erosion control and water quality.
- 2. Where is the State Forest Nursery?** The nursery, built in the 1930s, is located in Ames. A satellite nursery was added in southern Iowa near Montrose in 1982. The 98-acre Ames facility has the bulk of the infrastructure (coolers, grading room and shipping facilities) needed to run the nursery operation. The Montrose facility has little infrastructure and is situated on land rented from Iowa Prison Industries. Seedlings that are grown there are transported to Ames for cold storage, grading and shipping.
- 3. Why would the DNR sell tree and shrub seedlings to private landowners?** The State Forest Nursery was founded to support large-scale, conservation-based tree planting efforts. Since its founding, it has sold an estimated 155 million bareroot seedlings. The nursery does not sell ornamental or landscape trees.
- 4. Who pays for the nursery?** Prior to 1986, the State Forest Nursery was funded through a combination of the state general fund and seedling sales. After 1986, Iowa Code mandated it to run at the cost of operating the nursery. This means that under Iowa law, the only funds that should be used for the nursery are those generated through seedling sales.
- 5. How many customers do you have each year?** In an average year, the State Forest Nursery serves about 2,000 customers. Our records indicate in the last three years, 12 customers have bought about one-third of our trees. Typically, these large-volume customers are professional forestry consultants or vendors. The remainder of our customer base is comprised of farmers and private landowners.
- 6. How many trees and shrubs do you sell in a year?** Historically, the State Forest Nursery has sold as many as 4 to 5 million trees annually when demand was high, with an average of 2.8 million since 1973. However, since 2005, the nursery has experienced a steady decrease in seedling demand. In recent years, sales have averaged around 1 million plants annually.
- 7. I heard the DNR is considering closing the State Forest Nursery. Why?** While the DNR has not made a final decision, we are considering a number of alternatives regarding the nursery's future, due to increasing operational costs and decreasing revenues. One of those options does include ending seedling production at the nursery.
- 8. Why not just raise prices to cover costs?** A price increase large enough to generate the needed income would likely result in higher prices than those of surrounding private sector competitors and would, therefore, likely result in lower sales. Even a more moderate price increase would likely still result in a budget deficit, which is not allowable under Iowa Code. However, the DNR is examining that option.

- 9. I heard that some years the nursery has operated at a deficit?** Sales at the State Forest Nursery have been declining, resulting in a deficit at the nursery. This trend does not appear to be temporary, so the DNR is reviewing options going forward. If the State Forest Nursery operates at a loss, the DNR Forestry Bureau has to cut spending in other areas, such as state forest trail maintenance, state forest land management, woodland health monitoring and private landowner assistance to balance the overall budget.
- 10. Is other money available to cover the shortfall?** Under Iowa Code, transfer of revenue generated by sources other than seedling sales should not be used to fund the State Forest Nursery. In most cases, even if a transfer was permissible, funding sources are limited as to what they can spend funds on, meaning those funds cannot be used for the State Forest Nursery. In addition, allocating money from other program areas would eliminate or reduce other services, such as woodland health monitoring, state forest management and private landowner technical assistance.
- 11. Can the DNR downsize or minimize State Forest Nursery operations?** The savings associated with centralizing all nursery operations in Ames, in conjunction with a price increase, is being examined. In addition, the DNR has taken a number of steps over the years to find efficiencies in operations to reduce overhead costs.
- 12. Can I still buy trees from the State Forest Nursery this year?** Yes, the nursery will be open this year and will take orders. More information about how to order is available at www.iowatreeplanting.com
- 13. Where else can I get my seedlings for tree and shrub planting?** Seedlings can be purchased from in-state or out-of-state private sector nurseries, depending on availability. The plants may or may not be locally sourced or native plants. There may be additional costs, depending on how they are provided, who provides them and any related transportation costs. A list of nurseries is available at www.iowadnr.gov/Environment/Forestry/StateForestNursery/IowaNurseries.aspx.
- 14. Will those seedlings be suited for Iowa?** If you take care to order seedlings from in-state nurseries or out-of state nurseries that are relatively close to Iowa, you should be fine. However, it would be prudent to ask them where they get their seed to ensure it is not too far from your planting location. Native or locally sourced plants tend to grow better because they are better suited to local conditions.
- 15. With emerald ash borer, and other woodland pests and diseases spreading across Iowa, are you proposing to close a nursery that can provide replacement trees to communities and residents?** The State Forest Nursery provides conservation plantings, not ornamental or landscape trees. Find more information about its offerings at www.iowadnr.gov/Environment/Forestry/StateForestNursery/SeedlingCatalog.aspx.
- 16. Can I still get help planning my large planting projects from my District Forester?** Yes. DNR's District Foresters can help locate nurseries that grow stock suitable for your planting location. They can also help determine if there are any landowner assistance programs available. They are experts at dealing with the tree and shrub portions of the USDA's Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and Environmental Quality Improvement Program (EQIP), and the DNR's Resource Enhancement and Assistance Program (REAP). Find District Foresters at www.iowadnr.gov/Environment/Forestry/ForestryLandownerAssistance/DistrictForesterContacts.aspx.

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