

TWO YEARS AND **60,000** TREES LATER

An Update on the Alabama Tree Recovery Campaign

*By Clifford Hawkins, Community Development Coordinator
and Matthew McCollough, Urban Forestry Coordinator
Alabama Forestry Commission*

Following the devastating tornadoes of April 2011 that battered numerous Alabama communities, the Alabama Tree Recovery Campaign was launched as a collaborative effort between the Alabama Forestry Commission (AFC) and the Arbor Day Foundation. Its purpose was to support recovery and help restore the tree-lined streets, shaded parks, and beautiful neighborhoods that had always been part of Alabama, as they were before the storms. The ultimate goal of this large-scale, multi-year initiative was to bring the state's community forests back to their previous beauty and strength.

The Alabama Tree Recovery Campaign attracted tremendous support from across the nation and globe. In the first year of the program, over \$60,000 was raised through individual citizens, private foundations, and corporate donations. As a result, the AFC and the Arbor Day Foundation distributed 30,000 tree seedlings to 16 communities in February of 2012. They included Cordova, Cullman, Fyffe, Glen Allen, Hanceville, Ider, Jasper, Lakeview, Oakman, Ohatchee, Pleasant Grove, Reform, Shiloh, Sipsey, Tuscaloosa, and Vance.

Year two of this campaign proved successful as well. Utilizing funds that were raised in 2012, the AFC was able to distribute an additional 30,000 trees throughout the state, ultimately benefiting 18 communities. Realizing that the loss was felt everywhere and did not stop at the edge of the city limits, the AFC opened these giveaways not only to people living in the affected communities, but also to everyone in those coun-

ties. In February 2013, seedling giveaways were conducted in the following ten counties: Butler, Elmore, Franklin, Jackson, Limestone, Madison, Marion, Marshall, Tallapoosa, and Winston.

A vital ingredient in the success of seedling distribution is always the volunteers. Teaching a community to draw from its citizens leads to more community involvement and improved urban forests. Volunteers for both years have included Alabama Power employees, Alabama TREASURE Forest Association county chapters, Boy Scouts of America, Future Farmers of America, schools, church groups, civic clubs, elected officials, city employees, volunteer fire departments, Master Gardeners, as well as city tree boards and commissions.

While the cleanup and rebuilding will continue for some time into the future, the third and final year of the campaign is fast approaching. Continuing to focus on the priority list of tornado-stricken communities, the Alabama Forestry Commission is already planning for another round of seedling giveaways in February 2014. Assistance will be offered to 24 communities through giveaways in eight counties.

The opportunity remains for everyone to continue support of the Alabama Tree Recovery Campaign by making an online donation at www.arborday.org/takeaction/alabama. Every dollar donated will plant a community tree in Alabama. Every tree planted will provide hope and healing during the long-term recovery process. ☎