

Enterprise Rent-A-Car Helps Arbor Day Foundation Project

Associated Press Writer
Margery Beck

OMAHA, Neb. — In the 1930s, Arbor Day organizers planted millions of trees to stop devastating soil erosion during the Dust Bowl years on the Great Plains.

Now, the Nebraska-based National Arbor Day Foundation has turned to corporate America to stymie one of this century's greatest ecological threats: global warming.

The cornerstone of the organization's effort is a \$50 million pledge over the next half century from Enterprise Rent-a-Car Co. to help the U.S. Forest Service plant 50 million trees to combat deforestation, driven most recently by devastating wildfires in the west.

Trees absorb carbon dioxide, a so-called greenhouse gas believed by many scientists to be the primary cause of global warming.

The Arbor Day organization has a long history of helping the Forest Service with replanting efforts, foundation president John Rosenow said. But with the federal agency embroiled in expensive firefighting efforts, it has found itself in need of outside help for replanting forests more than ever.

Last year alone, 9.6 million acres of public and private forest lands were burned in the United States — a single-year record, Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth said. But the service is allotted only \$10 million for reforestation out of a \$5 billion annual budget.

That's where the Arbor Day Foundation comes in.

Last year, a foundation worker trolling corporate Web sites noted that Enterprise would celebrate its 50th anniversary in 2007. Hoping the company might want to commemorate the milestone with a donation toward replanting efforts, the foundation requested a meeting with Enterprise officials.

"We were overwhelmed by their response," Rosenow said. "We were hoping for a favorable reaction, but we had no idea they would be so strongly committed on such a long-term basis."

Bosworth is hoping that Enterprise's pledge will lead to other corporation participation in reforestation.

"Tree planting is particularly important right now, and I think it will continue to be important, because I don't see any let-up in terms of the fires," he said.

Individual members and corporate sponsors are stepping up more as news of the Enterprise pledge spreads, Rosenow said. He attributes that to more awareness of deforestation's impact on the environment.

"The Arbor Day Foundation will be providing very strong leadership in keeping replanting on the world's agenda as a very positive response to the need to react to the threat of global warming," he said.

Enterprise officials seemed as surprised by the effort as the Arbor Day Foundation and Forest Service.

It was Enterprise spokesman Pat Farrell who initially met with a foundation official seeking a pledge last year.

"He later confided to me that he was thinking about a one-time gift of 100,000 trees," Farrell said. "We basically said, 'How about 50 million?' I was afraid they were going to think it was too much."

Farrell said the Taylor family, which founded and still runs the privately held car rental company, is deeply committed to giving back to the community and the environment.

The fact that Enterprise — which buys more than 800,000 vehicles a year — contributed to the problem of global warming has not escaped the family's attention, Farrell said.

"It's a way of saying 'thank you' for the first 50 years, with a commitment for the next 50 years," he said.

Currently, every dollar of the pledge will cover the costs of growing and planting one seedling, no more than a foot tall. But as the cost of cultivating and planting grows, so too will Enterprise's pledge, Farrell said.

"The pledge is not for \$50 million; it's for 50 million trees," he said. "So, in the long run, there's no doubt the total pledge will end up being more than \$50 million."

On its Web site, Enterprise compares its gift to New York's Central Park, noting there are 25,000 trees in the Manhattan green space. So, the company says, its promise to plant one million trees a year would be akin to "planting a new Central Park every 10 days for the next 50 years."

Rosenow said the effort highlights what the National Arbor Day Foundation does best — plant trees.

The foundation's roots go back nearly 135 years when the first Arbor Day was celebrated in Nebraska in 1872, in response to a state proclamation urging settlers to plant trees that would provide shade, fruit, fuel and beauty for residents of the largely treeless Plains.

On that first Arbor Day, more than one million trees were planted in the state.

Even first lady Laura Bush has gotten behind the foundation's latest project. Last fall, she attended a ceremony in Missouri's Mark Twain National Forest to plant the first of the 50 million trees.

This year, more than 900,000 seedlings will be planted this spring in four national forests in the western United States, while another 40,000 seedlings will be planted each in Scotland and Canada, Rosenow said.

The foundation and Enterprise, with input from the U.S. Forest Service, selected those areas because of destruction they suffered in wildfires last year.

While some burned acreage won't need replanting, it can take deeply scorched land 75 to 100 years to see new tree growth.

Bosworth said the Forest Service has about a 90 percent tree survival rate among the seedlings it plants for reforestation.

