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Shade Trees on Playgrounds Program Accepting School Applications through October 3

LITTLE ROCK, AR – The Arkansas Department of Agriculture’s Forestry Division is accepting applications for the 20-year anniversary of the Shade Trees on Playgrounds (STOP) program through October 3, 2022. Arkansas schools needing additional shade on playgrounds can find the STOP program application and guidelines at agriculture.arkansas.gov/forestry/urban-community-forestry/stop-program/.

Selected schools receive up to five native shade trees, mulch, watering supplies, and planting guidelines, through grant funding provided by the U.S. Forest Service. Officials with the Forestry Division will help plant the trees during a ceremony with students this fall.

Urban forestry staff began the STOP program 20 years ago to help lower adult skin cancer risk by reducing childhood exposure to direct sunlight on school playgrounds. Since then, approximately 150 Arkansas schools have received trees. The STOP program also provides teachers with curriculum resources about the environmental benefits of trees, how shade reduces skin cancer risks, and tips for keeping trees healthy.

“The STOP program combines hands-on, outdoor experiences with classroom curriculum about the importance of trees and how to care for trees,” said Urban & Community Forestry Coordinator, Kristine Kimbro. “We hope this program not only improves the health of Arkansas students, but also leaves a lasting impression about the value of community trees and how to be good stewards of our natural resources.”

Trees native to Arkansas are chosen by Forestry Division staff to fit the unique region and conditions of each playground. Sycamores, oaks, tulip poplars, and black gum trees are common species for the program. To participate in the STOP program, a school must meet the following criteria:

- Lack shade on a school playground
- Participate in a virtual STOP workshop on October 7, 2022
- Use provided curriculum resource materials to emphasize the importance of trees during the week(s) leading up to the tree-planting event
- Involve students in tree-related projects that culminate with a school-wide tree-planting ceremony
- Hold a tree-planting ceremony prior to December 16, 2022 (can be held with limited attendance and livestreamed or recorded for later playback to larger audience)
- Be willing to maintain the trees after planting

Applicants may be any public or private Arkansas school serving grades pre-K through 12, or a non-traditional educational facility such as a juvenile detention center, residential childcare institution, or long-term care facility that has a playground in need of more shaded areas.

Learn more about Urban & Community Forestry services and programs at www.agriculture.arkansas.gov/forestry/urban-community-forestry. With program questions, contact Kristine Kimbro at 479-228-7929 or kristine.kimbrow@agriculture.arkansas.gov, or Harold Fisher at 501-580-4054 or harold.fisher@agriculture.arkansas.gov.

The Arkansas Department of Agriculture is dedicated to the development and implementation of policies and programs for Arkansas agriculture and forestry to keep its farmers and ranchers competitive in national and international markets while ensuring safe food, fiber, and forest products for the citizens of the state and nation. Visit agriculture.arkansas.gov/. The Arkansas Department of Agriculture offers its programs to all eligible persons regardless of race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability and is an Equal Opportunity Employer.