



## Nebraska National Forest

2015 WAS THE SECOND YEAR of planting ponderosa pines after the West Ash Wildfire in 2012. This wildfire, along with the 2012 Douthit Fire and the 2006 Spotted Tail Fire, burned over 35,000 acres of the ponderosa pine forest on the Pine Ridge District, leaving less than 5,500 green pine forest. The Soldier Creek Wilderness (7,800 acres) was completely burned in 1989. These wildfires have reduced the ponderosa pine landscape to only a few islands of green forested areas.

The primary objective is to reestablish ponderosa pine in the high-intensity burned areas of the fire scars. The seedlings were planted 15–20 feet apart, or between 100 and 200 seedlings per acre on approximately 300 acres. This wide spacing is to get pines back on as much of the landscape as possible so that they will create future micro-climate sites for natural regeneration to fill in.

Due to survival rates and harsh environment on the Pine Ridge Escarpment, reestablishing the pine to the landscape was accomplished by planting seedlings where they will have the best survival and reduced solar radiation. Priority planting was on north and east slopes when on top of the escarpment, or on south and west aspects, next to either a standing or down dead tree for the shade. Planting in small groups also occurred for future stand stability and creating future seedling sites. Planting in any of these small micro-environments will provide the best method for survival of the seedlings.

The project took place the first week of April by a contracted crew of 10-12 planters and one supervisor. The weather was ideal for the four days of planting, sunny and warm with no freezing temperatures at night. The 40,000 ponderosa pine trees were stored in a refrigerated trailer prior to planting. This project was a huge success thanks to all Arbor Day Foundation partners that made it a reality!

