

# TreeFolks

## TEEA 2015 Winner: Civic/Community



*Replanting makes progress towards recovery following the Bastrop County Complex Fire.*

The 2011 Bastrop County Complex Fire was the most destructive wildfire in Texas history, affecting over 34,000 acres of the Lost Pines region in Bastrop County. An estimated 75 percent of that acreage had private owners. Besides destroying over 1,600 homes and inflicting property damage estimated at \$325 million, the fire devastated the native population of loblolly pines, leaving many of the affected properties severely burned and unlikely to recover their original pine coverage. In response to this disaster, the Lost Pines Forest Recovery Campaign was started by a coalition of organizations to begin the process of reforestation on both public and private lands.

TreeFolks was a founding member of the Lost Pines Forest Recovery Campaign and entered into the project with the goal of accelerating the recovery of the Lost Pines; leading the efforts centered on private landowners by providing cost-free education and reforestation to those adversely affected by the fire. Starting with just a handful of employees in 1989, TreeFolks has had a tremendous effect on the Bastrop area and its inhabitants in the aftermath of the fire, making use of its local experience to efficiently handle the numerous challenges resulting from such a devastating disaster. During this process, TreeFolks recognized essential expertise that could be supplied by other stakeholders and embraced partnerships with groups such as the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center and the Texas A&M Forest Service.

Their efforts and successes consist of multiple replanting methods, including volunteer tree-planting events, professional and AmeriCorps planting crews, and county-wide tree giveaways to distribute the unique loblolly pine saplings to landowners. More than simply giving away the trees, TreeFolks educates each landowner on how to maintain the newly planted saplings and gives them a planting guide for best erosion control and general information on forest succession and other tree care.

Landowners are also provided with a comprehensive final tree-planting plan customized to show each individual property's needs. This individual attention under a regional repopulation strategy is a large part of what makes TreeFolks outstanding.

Three years after the Bastrop County Complex Fire, the organization is entering its third year of replanting, having wasted little time between the fire being put out and mitigation of the resulting damage. TreeFolks has planted over 660,000 saplings over the last two years, taking over 3,500 hours of volunteer service, with plans to get an additional 700,000 loblolly pines into the ground in their third year. Already well on their way, the ultimate goal for the organization is the planting of 2 million trees within the first five years. Local sentiment towards TreeFolks could not be more positive, with over 1,000 landowners having applied for tree-planting services and many more attending the hosted tree giveaways.

As a vital link in the public-private partnerships that aligned after tragedy in Bastrop, TreeFolks has helped ensure that the unique loblolly pine population there will once again attract people from across the state.