



CHEYENNE BOTANIC GARDENS

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News Release from the Cheyenne Botanic Gardens

For immediate release

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Photos available upon request

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Wyoming's first arboretum will preserve region's agricultural history

Wyoming's first public arboretum is being established in Cheyenne, Wyoming thanks to cooperation between federal, city and private entities. While the High Plains Arboretum is new, it preserves trees and plants that were established in Cheyenne from the 1930s to the 1970s. The site was part of a United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) former Horticulture Research Station in Cheyenne whose mission was to test, find and release plant varieties hardy enough for the High Plains.

"We are excited for this opportunity to preserve and restore one of the more important historic landscapes in the western United States," said Cheyenne Botanic Gardens Director Shane Smith.

For over 8 years the Friends of the High Plains Arboretum has been working to make this arboretum a reality. The Friends of the High Plains Arboretum is a subcommittee of the Friends of the Cheyenne Botanic Gardens. With help from the Friends of the High Plains Arboretum, the USDA and the city of Cheyenne entered into an agreement that returns 62 acres of land from a USDA lease back to the control of Cheyenne. This acreage will be the basis of the future High Plains Arboretum and will be operated by the Cheyenne Botanic Gardens with assistance from the City of Cheyenne Urban Forestry division. The arboretum is about five miles northwest of downtown Cheyenne.

Until 1974, the site housed the USDA High Plains Horticulture Research Station. It tested trees, shrubs, flowers, small fruits and vegetables for their suitability for growing in the harsh climate of the High Plains. Many of the plants tested were brought to this country by plant explorers from around the world. The goal of the station was to make the High Plains more habitable by providing plants for agriculture, protection, comfort and ornament, Smith said. Many of the plants come from similar climates in China, Mongolia and Russia. Hardy strawberries and raspberries developed at the site are still common in the region today and many other plants tested and developed there are sold in nurseries in the region.

In 1974, the USDA's mandate for the station changed and a grassland research station was established in place of horticulture. As a result acres of trees were minimally cared for. Nonetheless, about half the plants tested at the station have survived more than 30 years without care. Some are one-of-a-kind specimens. Many plants are tied to the interesting stories of how they got to the site.

Thanks to the agreement between USDA and Cheyenne, the High Plains Arboretum will implement a master plan developed by noted landscape architect, Herb Schaal of the firm EDAW. The goal of the plan for the arboretum is to preserve, restore and enhance this historic site. This master plan calls for the eventual development of a visitor's center, curation of the plants, and extensive interpretation.

The High Plains Arboretum will be operated by the Cheyenne Botanic Gardens with guidance and assistance from Cheyenne Urban Forestry, both of which are divisions of the city of Cheyenne Parks and Recreation. In addition it will receive citizen input through the Friends of the High Plains Arboretum committee, which is composed of regional horticulturists, educators, foresters, historians and green industry representatives.

“We look forward to telling the important stories of early 20th century plant explorers and their impact on the High Plains,” Smith said. “This site had much to do with the livability of many cities and the development of horticulture on the High Plains. We are excited about the future of this arboretum and its positive impact on the region. We also expect to see the arboretum contribute to more water-wise and beautiful landscapes.”

For more information contact the Cheyenne Botanic Gardens at (307) 637-6458 or at www.botanic.org.

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