

Food forest features grand opening and harvest festival on Sept. 28

September 24, 2019



After four years of planning and planting, the Taa-'at-dvn Chee-ne' Tetlh-tvm' food forest will feature a grand opening and harvest festival Sept. 28 to welcome and inform the community about the project.

"We would like a lot more people in the community to know about the food forest, and to understand they can come and harvest food and bring it home to their families," said Amanda Hixson, the food program's director.

The forest lies on the College of the Redwoods campus in Crescent City and is one of four food forest sites supported by a grant held by the Tolowa Dee-ni' Nation.

Organizers said the grand opening will include a variety of lively activities, such as garden arts and crafts, live music and a scavenger hunt, but also will provide an opportunity to learn about permaculture principles, composting and perennial food forests.

Attendees are encouraged to bring apples and buckets for apple pressing, as well as money for local food.

The event has been several years in the making ... four years, to be exact.

That's when the Del Norte and Tribal Lands Community Food Council applied for the U.S. Department of Agriculture National Institute of Food and Agriculture grant and proposed the Tolowa Dee-ni' Nation take on the project.

"It's a really cool project. It is really large in scope," said Erika Partee, natural resources director for the Tolowa Dee-ni' Nation. "I know it's been a really great project for the community as well."

Partee said it was valuable for the Tolowa Dee-ni' Nation to "pursue funding for food security for the county, and see the value in doing such a wide-reaching project."

With the grant, advocates planted perennial food forests, enhanced community gardens already in existence, financially supported school food gardens, and educated the community about food security and food production.

Their four main projects are at the Xaa-wan'-k'wvt Early Learning Program in Smith River; the Taa-'at-dvn Chee-ne' Tetlh-tvm' College of the Redwoods Del Norte campus in Crescent City; the Margaret Keating Elementary School campus in Klamath; and Saint's Rest Community Garden in Weitchpec.

The Tolowa Dee-ni' Nation and the Community Food Council have partnered on those projects, with the food council taking a lead role in the forest at the College of the Redwoods campus.

The food forests are a form of perennial agriculture that interplants fruit trees, crops, vines and other crops to mimic a natural forest ecosystem, said Partee.

"So, the food forests and the Hugelkultur methods all are ideas of how we can build perennial polycultures and permanent agriculture where they are sort of self-sustaining, self-supporting," said Andrea Lanctot, the community food program coordinator.

The foresting process takes several years, which is one reason the College of the Redwood forest grand opening is happening four years from its inception. Additionally, the forest's site developer, Ben Zumeta, had to overcome obstacles with the land, which formerly was a construction area.

"There was a lot of heavy-vehicle traffic and compaction of the soil, and tons of water running over the site," Hixson said.

Unlike a traditional garden or orchard that is lined with rows, this garden feels more like a forest, said Hixson. "He's created, with the help of the community, a beautiful food forest that we now feel like is at a place where we can have a grand opening. We want to bring all the community there so they understand this is for the community," Hixson said.

While the fruit trees are not yet producing to any extent, the forest has grown beans, strawberries, squash, potatoes, basil and lemon cucumbers. So far, about 50 pounds of produce per week have been donated to the Pacific Pantry, also run by the Community Food Council.

And the garden has provided an opportunity to educate students. Organizers have worked with the College of the Redwoods Del Norte campus to bring students in to volunteer and learn about the perennial-forest method.

Looking ahead, Hixson said she hopes the forest can be economically self-sustaining, eventually providing products to be sold at farmers markets and schools.