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## Community Agriculture Alliance: Conservation by Christmas tree

By Jackie Brown / For the Steamboat Today Thursday, December 8, 2011

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As you enjoy the awesome tree skiing, decorated trees in your home or just the magnificent landscape viewing this holiday season, perhaps you'll find yourself thinking about the facts behind Christmas's favorite decor.

Did you know that Christmas trees are grown in all 50 states and Canada and are a renewable, recyclable resource? For each tree harvested, three seedlings are planted in its place. According to the U.S. Commerce Department, 80 percent of artificial trees worldwide are manufactured in China and contain non-biodegradable plastics and possible metal toxins such as lead. About 350,000 acres are in production for growing Christmas trees in the U.S., many of them preserving green space. There are close to 15,000 farms growing Christmas trees nationally, and more than 100,000 people are employed full- or part-time in the industry.

Each winter, the Routt County Conservation District, in cooperation with the Colorado State Forest Service nursery in Fort Collins, brings you the opportunity to order seedlings at a discounted rate for conservation purposes to be delivered in May. If you own a minimum of 2 acres of land and are using the trees for conservation purposes, you qualify for our conditions of sale. More than 35 species of tree seedlings are available through our program, 10 species of 5- to 12-inch potted trees and limited numbers and varieties of large and extra-large potted trees.

Below are some examples of conservation through tree planting:

- Protecting property and livestock from the wind
- Restoring or enhancing natural beauty
- Reducing soil erosion and improving crop yields
- Providing food and cover for wildlife
- Increasing property values
- Increasing the number and health of forests
- Reducing water evaporation, preserving winter moisture and protecting and improving water quality
- Controlling snow drifts
- Reducing atmospheric carbon dioxide
- Reducing heating and cooling costs (by providing protection from sun and wind, trees can reduce energy costs by as much as 30 percent)



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- Protecting livestock from the elements, maintaining and improving livestock weight gain and reducing calving losses
- Increasing supplies of renewable resources

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Another topic being discussed lately is pollinators and their role in conservation. The ecological service pollinators provide is necessary for the reproduction of nearly 70 percent of the world's flowering plants, including more than two-thirds of the world's crop species. The United States alone grows more than 100 crops that either need or benefit from pollinators, and the economic value of these native pollinators is estimated at \$3 billion per year in the U.S. Fruits and seeds derived from insect pollination are a major part of the diet of approximately 25 percent of all birds and of mammals, ranging from red-backed voles to grizzly bears. In many places, the essential service of pollination is at risk from habitat loss, pesticide use and introduced diseases. Many of our seedlings serve as excellent habitat for pollinators; please inquire if you are interested.

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For help purchasing and planting trees for conservation, contact Jackie Brown at the Routt County Conservation District at 970-879-3225 or [Jaclyn.brown@co.nacdnet.net](mailto:Jaclyn.brown@co.nacdnet.net). Or visit [www.routtcountycd.com](http://www.routtcountycd.com) to download a form. Keep in mind that this program is offered all across Colorado and that species sell out quickly. All orders will be delivered in May 2012.

*Jackie Brown is the district manager for the Routt County Conservation District based in Steamboat Springs.*

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