



## Endlessly Wild & Wonderful

### 2023 U.S. Capitol Christmas Tree Initiative

#### History of the Tree

The tradition of the U.S. Capitol Christmas Tree, known as The People's Tree, began in 1964 when a live Christmas tree was planted on the Capitol lawn in Washington, D.C. That tree soon succumbed to wind and root damage. In 1970, the Architect of the Capitol asked the Forest Service to provide a harvested Christmas tree. Since then, a different national forest has provided the tree each year and embarked on a public engagement campaign to celebrate America's national forests. This will be the third time Monongahela National Forest has the honor of providing the U.S. Capitol Christmas Tree. Monongahela National Forest provided the first tree in 1970 and another in 1976.

#### About the Initiative

This year's initiative includes:

- the selection of The People's Tree,
- partnering with schools and groups to create 10,000 ornaments and 65 tree skirts that celebrate West Virginia and will adorn the U.S. Capitol Christmas Tree and smaller companion trees in federal offices in Washington, D.C.
- touring the harvested tree around the state; and,
- a tree lighting ceremony in Washington, D.C.

#### Endlessly Wild & Wonderful

This year's theme, *Endlessly Wild & Wonderful*, is a play on a motto commonly used in the state — *Wild & Wonderful West Virginia*. Throughout the national forest and the state, it is typical to see views of mountain ranges that seem nearly endless.

West Virginia is the third most-forested state in the nation, with about 78 percent of the state covered in trees. The national forest is the headwaters for six major river systems and fly fishing is becoming a



major draw for tourism, along with mountain biking. Hunting and fishing are important and traditional activities in the local culture.

Despite recent increases in visitation, in some areas of Monongahela National Forest it is still possible to hike a trail, paddle a river, or drive a remote road without seeing other people, resulting in a secluded experience that is becoming increasingly rare in many parts of the United States.

#### Tree Selection

Staff from the Architect of the Capitol chose a 63-foot Norway spruce from the Greenbrier Ranger District and Randolph County to serve as the 2023 U.S. Capitol Christmas Tree this holiday season.

The Shawnee Tribe has named the tree “wa’feem’tekwi”. The name means “bright tree” in the Shawnee language and is pronounced “wa thame tech we”. The tribe has also contributed handmade ornaments and messaging for the educational exhibit that will tour with the tree in November. After the holidays, the Shawnee Tribe will use wood from the tree at their ceremonial grounds in White Oak, Oklahoma.

The Greenbrier Ranger District provided the very first Christmas tree provided from the Forest Service to the U.S. Capitol in 1970, also a Norway spruce. A red spruce was provided from the Gauley Ranger District in 1976.

#### The Journey to Washington, D.C.

Once the tree is harvested in early November, it will be packed onto a truck and begin a tour of West Virginia before it is delivered to the Architect of the Capitol in mid-November. Beginning November 4, the tree's journey can be tracked online at <http://www.capitoltreetracker.com>. Communities along the way will host events where attendees can

view a portion of the tree on the truck, sign the truck banner, and learn more about

Monongahela National Forest and the Forest Service's multiple use mission. A complete schedule of public events is available at <https://www.uscapitolchristmastree.com>.

A tree lighting ceremony will take place November 28 on the West Lawn of the U.S. Capitol, hosted by the Architect of the Capitol in coordination with the U.S. Speaker of the House. The winner of a fourth-grade essay contest will take part in the tree lighting ceremony. Hosted by Senator Joe Manchin, the contest asked West Virginia fourth graders to describe why they love West Virginia forests and public lands.

### **Monongahela National Forest**

Monongahela National Forest, located in the Allegheny Mountains of east central West Virginia, was established April 28, 1920. The Forest includes more than 920,000 acres of federal land in ten counties.

Located within a day's drive of nearly half the nation's population, an estimated average of 500,000 people visit annually. The Forest is biologically diverse with variations in precipitation and elevations ranging from 1,000 feet above sea level to 4,863 feet at the state's highest peak, Spruce Knob. Monongahela National Forest is a working forest, providing timber, water, grazing, minerals, fish and wildlife habitat, and recreational opportunities.

The Forest is part of the Eastern Region which includes 17 national forests and one national tallgrass prairie. The Eastern Region is home to the Forest Service's largest state, private, and tribal forestry program, collaborating with tribes, states, communities, federal agencies, private landowners, and other partners to protect, conserve, and manage forests and community trees across 20 states and the District of Columbia. Learn more about the Forest and Region at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/mnf>.

### **About the Forest Service**

The mission of the Forest Service is to sustain the health, diversity and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations. The agency manages 193 million acres of public land; assists state and private landowners; and maintains the largest forestry research organization in the world. These lands contribute more than \$13 billion to the economy each year through visitor spending alone. National forests also provide 20 percent of the nation's clean water supply, a value estimated at \$7.2 billion per year. Learn more at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/>.

### **Choose Outdoors**

Choose Outdoors is the Forest Service's key project partner in the U.S. Capitol Christmas Tree initiative. They work to increase all American's enjoyment, appreciation and support for outdoor recreation activities that connect them to public lands. These connections ensure that America's public lands are also cherished by future generations. Learn more at [www.chooseoutdoors.org](http://www.chooseoutdoors.org).

### **Connect and Follow Along**

Follow along with our progress on the social media. Use the hashtags when sharing your ornament-making progress on social media.

- <https://www.uscapitolchristmastree.com>
- <https://www.capitoltreetracker.com>
- <https://www.facebook.com/USCapitolChristmasTree>
- <https://www.facebook.com/MonongahelaNF>
- Twitter: @USCapitolTree
- Instagram: @uscapitolchristmastree
- Hashtags:
  - #uscapitolchristmastree
  - #2023uscapitolchristmastree
  - #endlesslywildandwonderful
  - #monongahelanationalforest

### **Media Toolkit**

<https://usfs-public.app.box.com/v/monongahela-media-kit>.