

Raise a Glass; Thank a Tree!

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Volunteers Jan and Greg Bernu were stellar tree ambassadors during the tree seedling distribution in Brimson. Their volunteer efforts contributed to the distribution of over a thousand seedlings for woodland owners to plant as they seek to restore fire-devastated forests.

“Raise a glass; thank a tree!”

It's not really the motto of Team Dovetail. But recently, members of the Team joined hands and hearts to assist in reforesting fire-devastated northeastern Minnesota, while also sharing the message of Forest to Tap (F2T), a program supported by Dovetail Partners and associated forestry organizations. The program promotes the link between good water and sustainable forestry. There was no better way to do so than to visit the thousands of acres of forested lands recently destroyed by the Brimson Complex wildfires northeast of Duluth in Saint Louis County and hand out seedlings of hope.

The Brimson fires, specifically the Camp House fire and Jenkins Creek fire, were two major wildfires in northeastern Minnesota in May 2025 near the small community of Brimson. The wildfires proved devastating to homes and lands. The fires grew to over 37,000 acres combined and led to evacuations and destruction of over 140 structures.

With a few thousand red and white pine seedlings in hand, donated by Minnesota Power, Team members and volunteers met at Hugo's Bar in Brimson, a staging point for those dealing with losses and searching for hope during the wildfires that took their homes and woodlands. Another organization, “Let's Plant Trees,” saw a Facebook post about F2T giving away seedlings at Hugo's and offered extra trees from their spring giveaway events—adding even more variety and heartbeat to the mix.

Along with the seedling distribution, team members and volunteers shared a simple idea: healthy forests result in healthy waters. Good forest management, including planting and harvesting, results in healthy forests that can then act as natural umbrellas, filters, and sponges to reduce the contaminants in the water and the soils, resulting in clean quality water for everything from wildlife to beer.

The 'tap' part of the program title reflects F2T's annual seedling giveaway at craft breweries throughout northern Minnesota. Typically held on Arbor Day, volunteers hand out tree seedlings to brewery patrons and their families, while sharing the message about the connection between healthy forests and healthy waters. When another forestry-minded program, Firewise, initially suggested bringing trees to the Brimson area for community members in May, Team Dovetail was on it, thanks to Dovetail Team Member – St. Louis County Firewise Coordinator Gloria Erickson. With deep connections in the area, Gloria helped spread the word about the event and provided information about how people could increase the wildfire resiliency of their homes and land going forward.

F2T Program Director Eliza Meyer was joined on site by Greg and Jan Bernu. Greg is a retired Carlton County land commissioner and serves on the F2T Advisory Board. Jan operates a private forestry consulting firm: Two by Forestry. The two were instrumental in delivering trees to the Brimson area and handing out seedlings.

Now, more than two months after the fires, folks are still picking up the pieces of their homes and lives. And putting trees back in the ground – planting hope and resilience, one tree at a time.

*To learn more about Forest to Tap visit
dovetailinc.org/program-foresttotap.
For more information on Let's Plant Trees go to
letsplanttrees.org.*