BUTTE LAROSE—For decades, Atchafalaya Basin cypress trees that took hundreds of years to grow were harvested for lumber and garden mulch. In their place grew invasive "trash" trees.

But the Evangeline Area Council of the Boy Scouts, along with several state and federal agencies, are working to change that. Their goal is for visitors to the Atchafalaya Basin 100 years from now: "We want to leave information for 100 years from the beauty of a cypress now so they'll know what we did, how we did it and why we did it," he said.

More than 1,000 Boy Scouts, troop leaders, parents and volunteers converged on the Basin at Butte La Rose on Saturday to plant about 5,000 cypress trees on 300 acres of state land near the welcome center off Interstate 10.

The new forest is being called the Centennial Forest to honor the 100th anniversary of scouting in America. The planting is the first "good turn" the Boy Scouts are planning in conjunction with their centennial celebration. Other events may include a trash bash, the development of primitive campsites and the creation of hiking and canoeing trails. Gary McGoffin, a scout, said the planting "makes a difference."

Singled out by Angelle for her efforts was Toni DeBosier, a coastal scientist/forester with the Atchafalaya Basin Program within the DNR, "who breaks the mold of the state employee. "She eats, sleeps and drinks the Atchafalaya Basin," he said. "Each one of us is obligated to be a steward of the lands here."

The Centennial Forest project could not have been created without the cooperation of the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources, headed by Angelle, McGoffin noted. Other agencies involved in the project include the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, Department of Environmental Quality, Development and Transportation, along with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, St. Martin Parish government and Sheriff's Office.

Photos by Denny Culbert/adcultert@theadvertiser.com