

**Protecting Trees**

Arbor Day has long been a high-profile way to stress the importance of healthy trees for a healthy environment. But protecting trees in a habitat-sustaining manner, such as those utilized in mitigation bank-funded projects, is not simple. Planting and caring for a single tree in your backyard is a lot different than planting and sustaining trees along three acres of creek winding through an old farm.

For example, game will eat seedlings, which undermines the development of game-supporting habitat. Abandoned farm fields may be prime ground for restoring to habitat, but farm fields are also prime ground for mice and field moles, both of



**The perforated edge of the tree shelter enables the tree to grow safely within them before they begin to split and fall aside when the tree reaches a safer growth stage.**

which can be highly destructive to creating a more diverse habitat.

As such, when forestation is part of habitat creation—regardless of whether it is connected to a mitigation bank—a strong emphasis needs to be placed on making sure those trees and affiliated plants can take root and grow free of disease or

failure-causing interference. How you protect those plants in the early stages of development will largely determine the success of your site.

Tree shelters are critical. These products are positioned around a young tree or allow a tree to grow, in its earliest phase, up through the shelter. Constructions vary. Home gardeners might use scrap, like chicken wire or snow fence or black tubing cut from garden supplies. But on larger sites with greater plant life to protect, such as on a 2- or 5-acre habitat-creating plot for a mitigation investment or corporate campus, you will want something a little more engineered.

Fiberweb's Tubex ([www.tubex.com](http://www.tubex.com)) product line is intriguing here. The solid tube units allow for strong protection of seedlings and young trees, high air moisture, more secure water management even in drought phases, etc.

The tubes are available in standard product sizes up to approximately 5 ft, which allows for significant years of protection against larger animal damage, such as from deer. Also of note, these products have a laser-perforated edge, which means the product will not prevent the tree from safe growth. When the trunk expands out-grape growers want to protect their investment. Tree shelters like Tubex provide that security. But the mitigation banking trend continues to grow, especially with the influence and guidance of the US Army Corp of Engineers, United States Department of Agriculture, and other government agencies. They have helped put in place assurances in how these lands are developed so that habitat creation is successful. That's an attractive proposition to investors, which is why formal, professionally managed mitigation banks have gone from single digits in their earliest days in the 1980s to hundreds of groups and opportunities today.

Also, government cost-share programs, such as through USDA, are helping spur development and expertise, as technical expertise is sought in the private market. Consult your local or regional USDA offices for information on potential cost-share strategies as well as further information on types of development, such as wetland banks for emerging (more herbaceous) wetlands and forested wetlands.



**Backfilling the artificial island after establishing the geocontainer-secured perimeter. Photo by Maccaferri.**

ward, the tree's circumference will begin to apply pressure to the shelter. The shelter's perforated edge will begin to split until it either falls aside or a land manager removes it now that the tree has reached a more se-

cure stage of maturity.

Mitigation banking is certainly not the only area in which this type of product is used. Viticulture, for example, is an interesting market. As vineyards expand,