

SOS Elms News

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President's Message - Richard Kerbes

Dutch Elm Disease (DED) has not yet been detected in Saskatoon, but it came one step closer last summer. It was confirmed in Davidson, about 100 km to the south (see article by Elena Schacherl). As you know, DED is lethal to the American Elm, which is the most common mature tree in the older residential areas and parks of Saskatoon. The uncontrolled spread of DED would be devastating - imagine how bare our older areas would be without their big elms. Soon - perhaps this summer - Saskatoon must rise to the challenge of fighting DED. SOS Elms believes that a pro-active approach is the most effective and efficient way to preserve our urban forest. As a specific action in that regard, in a project organized by Michelle Chartier, this winter we are distributing an educational video to the presidents of community associations and others. It is the tragic story of how DED destroyed most of the elms in Great Falls, Montana. We also have two new projects: A DED Contingency Plan for Saskatoon - Board Member Ray Boyle pointed out the need for such a plan, and he has written a draft outline. As he said, "Everyone in

Saskatoon may be lulled into a false sense of security about DED. It hasn't happened yet. We have been very lucky so far and we hope that our luck continues for a long time, but one day a small problem will rapidly become a large one It is essential for SOS Elms to be ready with a plan for IMMEDIATE action." Our Board has enthusiastically endorsed Ray's idea, and we are expanding and refining his draft plan. This action plan to be mobilized when DED is found in Saskatoon, will lay out specific roles and actions for SOS Elms board members, volunteer members, and others. Its purpose will be to provide a calm effective plan when our community is hit with the stress of an expanding DED infection. We will need everyone to be on-side when the trees start falling!

This winter the SOS Elms Board regretfully accepted resignations from by Rick Miller and Toso Bozic. We thank both for their participation, and we appreciate that both remain in touch and available to help out if needed for specific events. Brad Mitchell, who worked on the Saskatoon Tree Inventory last summer joined our board this winter. A welcome addition, he has already taken on responsibilities for organizing our SOS Elms display at the Heritage Fair on February 20, and for Gardenscape in late March (he needs volunteers). My sincere thanks go to all the people on our Board and to SOS Elms members who volunteered their time, expertise, and monetary support to our activities.

1999 SOS Elms Summer Tree Inventory - Brad Mitchell

Once again the SOS Elms summer tree inventory continued in Saskatoon. Under the supervision of Ray Boyle, the team consisting of Brad Mitchell, Paul Uhryn, and Dorian Klingenburg, successfully surveyed a large area of the city.

The work began in May, with the first two weeks being dedicated to training in the proper identification of tree species and tree diseases. As well as conducting the survey itself, we distributed informational pamphlets throughout the neighbourhoods and answered any questions people had. We instructed homeowners on the proper care and maintenance of trees, especially elms, and made sure to stress the importance of the elm cutting ban from April 13 to July 31. Although it was commonly assumed that we were employed by the city, we did our best to explain the nature of the SOS Elms Coalition and its importance.

A complete survey of Eastview, Brevoort Park, Nutana Park, and most of Hudson Bay Park was carried out. Thankfully we did not discover any cases of DED, however many elms located on private property were in dire need of maintenance. Not surprisingly most of these were Siberian Elms.

In general, citizens seemed to at least have some vague knowledge of the threat of DED to our city, and the majority of the trees in the areas surveyed were in relatively good condition. However, the importance of the elms to the city was not fully recognized by most people.

This lack of awareness must change if we hope to save our elms. Continuing exposure at events such as Gardenscape and the U of S Horticulture Fair is needed in order to

maintain and raise the public awareness of DED in Saskatoon.

Dutch Elm Disease spreads into central Saskatchewan

Elena Schacherl, Saskatchewan DED Program Administrator

More has been happening than ever before in Saskatchewan to protect our elms from DED. Here are the highlights of the DED program:

DED 1999 Survey Results

This year's survey identified DED in Davidson, a significant movement of the disease into the central part of the province. The closest DED site to Davidson is Buffalo Pound Provincial Park near Moose Jaw. Although elm firewood was suspected in the spread of the disease into Davidson, no elm wood was found in the town. This fall Verna Mumby was hired to carry out an elm inventory in Davidson. She found 10 other American elms with signs of DED. These elms will be tested as soon as possible come spring.

Davidson is only 90 km from Outlook and its large population of native elms. With DED now present in the area, we can expect the disease to speed up its advance towards Saskatoon, only 100 km north.

Generally, DED numbers were up around Saskatchewan. The exception was such cost-share communities as Moosomin where numbers dropped as a result of intensive management efforts. The hardest hit this year were the resort areas in the Qu'Appelle Valley. DED was found for the first time in Lebret, the Village of Fort San, and at Pasqua Lake. Established infections in the northeast and southeast also continued to spread this year, with the

number of diseased elms increasing significantly in some communities including: Aylsham, Arborfield, Nipawin, Lumsden, Estevan and Carnduff.

SERM has completed the 1999 tree removals with 911 elms removed in communities and buffers province-wide. For the first time this year, SERM limited surveillance and removal to municipalities with 400 or more American elms, and targeted buffer areas. A federal grant allowed the Saskatchewan Dutch Elm Disease Association (SDEDA) to expand the surveillance to include additional communities. The combined SDEDA and SERM surveillance efforts identified DED in 25 municipalities across the province.

Urban Rural Habitat Renewal Grant

In 1999 Saskatchewan’s Dutch Elm Disease program received a federal grant from the Urban Rural Habitat Renewal program for approximately \$400,000. In addition to allowing for increased surveillance, these funds were distributed to communities and organizations to carry out elm inventories and pruning . Priority for funding was given to municipalities with the most significant number of American elms at risk from Dutch elm disease. The funds were targeted to municipalities not already receiving assistance under the provincial Dutch elm disease cost-share program. Some of the funds went to the SDEDA to carry out a province-wide, multi-media, public awareness campaign. SDEDA also hired some contractors to assist communities with elm inventories. SOS Elms received funding to continue its inventory of private trees in Saskatoon and carry out some public awareness.

The inventories have now been completed, but not all numbers are in yet. Some surprising preliminary results are the higher-than-anticipated numbers in

southwestern communities. High numbers of Siberian elms were also found in many communities. Regina completed a two mile buffer inventory and about 50% of their private elm inventory.

Saskatoon also received some funding to carry out an inventory of elms surrounding the city. In the 2 to 4 km wide zone surveyed, the city found 50,590 elm trees. About 7000 of these were American elm, mostly located on acreages south of the city. Saskatoon also received some funds for pruning. The elms pruned were in Woodlawn Cemetery, an area not normally covered by the city’s DED budget.

New SERM Minister Meets with SDEDA

- Elena Schacherl, Saskatchewan DED Program Administrator

The Saskatchewan Dutch Elm Disease Association (SDEDA) met with the new SERM minister, Buckley Belanger, in the middle of December. DED was actually mentioned in the recent provincial throne speech in the context of increased support for communities to manage DED. According to the Minister, this was a positive indicator with regards to funding for next year’s DED program. The actual status of next years’ DED budget, however, won’t be known until the provincial budget is announced in the spring. The Minister also offered to check into the long stalled, new DED legislation, and see if he could do something to move it forward. Finally, the new Saskatoon MLA, Peter Prebble, is also supporting the need for increased funding, given the seriousness of the Dutch elm disease situation in this province.

