

SOS Elms News

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SOS Elms Coalition, P.O. Box 1313, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S7K 3N9

Web Site: www.soselms.org



LEARNING FROM OUR NEIGHBOURS ABOUT DUTCH ELM DISEASE

By Judith Benson

Saskatoon's urban forest, public and privately owned, includes fewer than 90 000 mature American Elms, down from 100 000 thirty years ago. Most of the losses have been due to abuse of trees during street work, building construction and/or demolition, utility maintenance, and careless human adherence to tree care. Fortunately, Dutch Elm Disease (DED) has not yet been discovered in Saskatoon. Even without it we continue to lose our elms due to needless disregard. What will the loss be like when DED strikes? All conditions for the disease are present. We have the beetles but thus far none of them is known to carry the deadly fungus that could wipe away our elms in a few months. Just one fungus-carrying beetle hitchhiking into the city on an infected elm log could devastate the landscape and alter the ecosystem of the city whose centennial we have celebrated so ardently this year. We must be prepared to redouble our efforts to ensure that our city and its citizens are cognizant of measures that can save our elms.

The City of Winnipeg invests in DED prevention research and works with its citizen Coalition to Save the Elms to facilitate the health of residential and boulevard elms. Since 1975, Winnipeg's American Elm inventory has been reduced from 275 000 to 165 000 due to DED.

Thanks to a high regard for the trees by Winnipeg's city council and its residents, its urban forest still includes a significant elm population. Working against our neighbour is the fact that wild elms grow along its riverbanks, where DED spreads like wildfire, as it has in Saskatchewan's Qu'Appelle, Souris, Carrot and other river valleys. Most of Winnipeg's 3500 per year elm loss since 2000 has been made up of wild elms. Its boulevard elms are in good shape, but this year the city had up to 6000 trees which were diseased or hazard (defined as those with 40% or more deadwood). One reason for the increased loss in Winnipeg was a high survival rate of elm bark beetles due to mild winter weather. Also, the city has suffered one year of drought. The increase in infections and difficulty in keeping up with surveillance and removal of DED infected trees has put Winnipeg's elm population at a higher risk than ever.

Saskatoon has no indigenous elms growing in its river valley, but seven drought years have affected the total urban forest. The welcome spring rains of the past two years cannot be expected to have restored the water table to normal levels. Saskatoon is in a development boom of expanding roads, residential areas, and businesses, all of which take their toll on the urban forest. Woodlawn Cemetery contains some 200 hazard elms, which serve as ideal breeding habitat for elm bark beetles. More beetle habitat is available in Saskatoon's buffer zone, which is outside the jurisdiction of the

City. It contains hazard elms and a private elm disposal site. On behalf of SOS Elms I have written to the Saskatchewan Environment Minister about this, but have not received a satisfactory response.

How can we promote citizen interest in Saskatoon's urban forest? As a new way to help raise the profile of trees in Saskatoon, I am working on a DVD for public distribution (see note on p. 10). This is but one idea - we need more! Please - check our web site soselms.org and think about what can be done to get people to appreciate our urban forest and to get involved in its care. Share your ideas with us, by e-mail to soselms@soselms.org, or by snail mail to SOS Elms Coalition, PO Box 1313, Saskatoon S7K 3N9.

Updates on City Elm Issues

By Judith Benson

1. To band or not to band?

Sticky Banding of trees, to entrap flightless female cankerworm moths, was resumed in Regina and Winnipeg this fall, due to concern there that cankerworm numbers were on the upswing. Here in Saskatoon it seemed to me that we were also seeing an increase in cankerworms, leaf rollers and tent caterpillars. So in late August I checked with Ian Birse, Superintendent of Urban Forestry for Saskatoon, about resumption of tree banding here.

He confirmed that some individual trees in various parts of the city had been infested with cankerworms, but there had been no widespread defoliation, and banding was not needed or justified. He pointed out that deciduous trees can tolerate moderate amounts of insect defoliation, and that we have a species of wasp that parasitizes the eggs and pupae of cankerworms, leaf

rollers, and tent caterpillars. He reminded me that banding has harmful side effects. It inadvertently kills large numbers of spiders and other predators which help to control the harmful insects. That was demonstrated in Saskatoon by a study done in 2001 and 2002 by Dr. Susan Kaminskyj of the U of S Biology Dept., (reported in SOS Elms News, Spring 2003). Also, the SOS Elms board remains concerned that sticky bands are often not maintained properly, and become a useless eyesore, and potentially harmful to our trees. In short, mass banding next spring is NOT recommended for Saskatoon.

2. Elms in Woodlawn Cemetery and Holiday Park Golf Course

Woodlawn Cemetery and Holiday Park Golf Course generate their own revenues and are responsible for pruning and caring for their trees, where, unfortunately, they have been falling short. This fall Woodlawn management coated the cemetery's roadways with oil. That effort not only caused oil seepage into the soil beneath the adjacent trees, but the large vehicle that spread the oil broke healthy branches from newly pruned mature elms and other trees! Mr. Birse had used part of his Department's tree care budget to prune the trees most in need in the Cemetery earlier this fall. He plans to use some of next year's budget for pruning in the Golf Course, beginning in September 2007. The adjacent campground allows campers to bring in their own firewood. Instead of inspecting that wood, management there relies on campers heeding the posted signs which ban the use of elm firewood.

3. Concern for trees in the downtown core

The elms along 24th Street have been devastated by condominium construction at 24th and Spadina Cr. E. The City has no

legal jurisdiction over tree roots or any other part of a City tree which extends onto private property. Since we know that the roots of all trees extend to the circumference of the tree canopy, shouldn't the City require builders to plan their projects outside the limits of the elm canopy?

If you walk south along Spadina Crescent East, from Knox United Church to the Sheraton Hotel, you may notice flat circular iron grills that surround the bases of the young elms. I counted ten without trees, i.e. trans-plantings that had not survived. When I questioned Mr. Birse about the integrity of underground systems to get water and nutrients to the roots of new plantings, he advised that the City has an irrigation section that is responsible for inspecting, repairing and maintaining all of our irrigated areas including those in the downtown area and 25th Street. He advised that the City's Urban Design section plans projects, such as last year's widening of 25th Street, without consulting Urban Forestry. However, Urban Design pays Urban Forestry to replace city trees which are destroyed or damaged by City developments. Urban Forestry is often not able to find the size and quality desired in replacement trees, so must settle with what is available. Thus, if new trees are not strong to begin with and once planted are not irrigated properly (by a section outside Mr. Birse's control) is it not a waste of human and natural resources as well as our tax dollars?

4. What Can We Do?

Do you note traces of scepticism and gloom and doom in my reporting? Yes! However, I don't believe in complaining without taking action to address these concerns. Clearly, we need a POLICY on Tree Care. The board of SOS Elms Coalition, with the active support of our members, must work with

appropriate authorities and officials to prepare a POLICY that includes legal guidelines regarding our urban forest. The following is a start on it:

A Draft Tree Care Policy For Saskatoon

by Judith Benson

Regarding existing trees:

- Private enterprise must apply for special permits for building along treed city streets and be legally bound to comply with guidelines for protecting and caring for the trees during construction
- Home owners must apply for permits to extend their homes and install sprinkler systems that might interfere with city tree health
- The city must hire inspectors to watch over the replacement of curbing, widening of streets, excavating during sewer problems, etc. to make sure tree health is not jeopardized
- The City must inspect the work of contracted tree pruners during the actual pruning process, especially that of the elms
- The City must heavily fine and make known to the public elm pruners who do not comply with the Provincial Regulations for proper elm wood disposal. The public must have this information so they do not hire the same pruners to maintain their residential trees and thus also be in violation.
- The City must work with Corman Park and provincial authorities to prune or remove hazard trees and

control elm wood disposal within our buffer zone.

- Relevant city experts must educate managers and employees of Woodlawn Cemetery and Holiday Park Golf Course and Campground regarding the threat of DED entering the City through their venues as a result of their not cutting hazard trees or regulating the entry of elm firewood

Regarding new plantings:

- The City allocate budget for quality trees to be purchased, planted and properly maintained, including timely irrigation
- The City keeps public records of species of new plantings, their needs and survival rates so we know where our tax dollars are going.
- The City issue fines to those caught vandalizing trees

There are probably many other items to be included. Many cities have policies on behalf of their urban forests. Those of Regina, Moose Jaw and Winnipeg could guide the writing of one for Saskatoon. The arrival of DED in Saskatoon would constitute an emergency. A Tree Care Policy would be a pre-emptive and preventative measure. Without a Policy, the City will continue to neglect our urban trees, which makes them vulnerable to DED instead of resistant to it and other diseases.

The SOS Elms Coalition board is small and is made up of volunteers with many other obligations. We have no paid employee and most of our current board members have served SOS Elms for many years. We need help! I appeal to you, our dedicated

members, to support our efforts to work with the City to develop a TREE POLICY. Please phone me at 653-4339 or e-mail me at jg.benson@shaw.ca. What a fine New Year's resolution this would be!

SPLIT – A COMMUNITY TREE PLANTING INITIATIVE

By Michelle Chartier and Linda Moskalyk

School's Plant Legacy in Trees (SPLIT) continues to provide an opportunity for hundreds of young people from Saskatoon to participate in a tree planting and landscaping initiative and learn about relevant issues concerning Saskatchewan's forests and the environment. 2006 marks the third season and fourth school participating in SPLIT. In early June the entire student population of St Frances School rolled up their sleeves to help plant thirty two trees and one hundred shrubs adjacent to their school. This planting had an enormous impact on the look of their school yard. Some of the trees were planted with shrubs in beds to improve the appearance of the school. Others were strategically planted to provide shade and shelter to students using the playground. The result is that St Frances has morphed from a significantly barren landscape, with few trees, to an attractive green space for students and community members to enjoy.

Urban and community forests within the province of Saskatchewan are an important and vital part of a healthy living environment. Many citizens do not realize the important role that trees play in our every day life and the benefits they provide. SPLIT is a partnership between the City Of Saskatoon, Riversdale Kiwanis Club, the Saskatchewan Forestry Association, the Tree Canada Foundation, and SOS Elms Coalition. This initiative has helped foster community spirit and pride. Residents have

a better understanding of the importance of the urban forest, and a deeper appreciation of their neighborhood. Tree planting is used as an educational tool to promote trees as an essential component of a healthy environment. The program is also a great deal of fun for everyone who participates.

Thanks go out to the many contributors to SPLIT including: The Saskatoon Community Foundation, Toyota Evergreen, Saskatchewan Outdoor Environmental Education Association (SOEEA), and the Exhibition Community Association which contributed funding. Thanks also to Lakeshore Garden Centre and Dutch Growers for their generous donation of shrubs, and Wilco Landscape Construction for the cultivation of planting beds.

Demise of the Rendek Elm Forest

By Karen Wiebe, Biology Dept., U. of S.

(Editor's note: The following article first appeared in the Saskatoon Sun on 25 October 2006. This is the fourth article on the Rendek in SOS Elms News, dating back to 1997).

Elm trees that so many of us enjoy as an urban forest along Saskatoon's roadsides also form natural forests in Saskatchewan, mainly along the flood plains of river valleys. One of these natural elm forests, 14.2 ha in size, was donated by Alex Rendek to Nature Saskatchewan in 1989. The Rendek Elm Forest Sanctuary is located about 14 km northeast of the city of Hudson Bay on Highway 3 and has been a popular area for nature lovers from all parts of the province. Perhaps the most impressive feature of the preserve was the stand of mature American elms which covered about 75% of the land and reached up to 23 m in height. Another striking feature was the luxurious understory of plants comprised mainly of ostrich ferns which may grow as tall as a person! Hiking trails along the river's edge and through the

forest revealed a rich diversity of plants, lichens, birds and invertebrates.

In 1999, two trees on the preserve were found with signs of DED. The disease had been tracked for many decades gradually moving west across North America, and had now reached the Rendek elms. High costs of controlling or treating DED makes its containment in wild forests nearly impossible, so it was decided to let nature run its course. That same year in 1999, I, together with a few other birders from Saskatoon, initiated a survey of breeding birds and vegetation structure in the preserve with the intention of monitoring changes in the bird community caused by the death of the elms. Bird surveys were conducted from 1999-2001 while the forest was still mainly healthy, but by 2002, six elms were dying of the infection. By 2005, mortality of the large elms was nearly 100%.

Although there are still some Manitoba maples and Balsam poplars on the preserve, its character has changed dramatically with the death of the elms. It is unlikely the wild elm forest will ever regenerate as the disease is persistent in the environment. Whether other tree species may fill in the gaps left by the elms is unknown. We hope to continue bird surveys in the forest and predict that populations of woodpeckers and cavity-nesters may increase as they take advantage of the dead trunks and rich insect food source. In the longer term, it will be interesting to track changes in the understory vegetation as more sunlight may now penetrate the tree canopy. Trails on the preserve are being kept open and the public is still welcome to enjoy a beautiful and dynamic ecosystem facing major transitions.

Capturing the Essence of Trees Through Art

By Linda Moskalyk

(From Canadian Trees Magazine, fall 2006)

I have dabbled in drawing and painting for as long as I can remember. About ten years ago I began to dedicate more time to it. I attribute the heightened interest in creating serious art partly to my line of work. My occupation as an arborist and the experience of growing up in rural Saskatchewan has provided me with the familiarity and motivation to paint trees.

Through time, trees have often been the focus of artists expressing the infinite forms and colour of this subject matter. The tree art of Vincent Van Gogh and Emily Carr have been an inspiration and influence on me. Van Gogh's famous impressionist paintings often included cypress, mulberry, peach and olive trees. Emily Carr painted the forests of British Columbia's west coast with unusual individuality. She focused on movement and what needed to be expressed. Her work conveys a mysterious language and speaks of the essence of the old growth forest. Carr's immersion into the native culture is reflected in her depictions of the Haida artisan's magnificent totems. Crafted from the old trunks of red cedar, these ornate totem poles communicate life through powerful images.

I have heard it jokingly said that Saskatchewan's provincial tree is the telephone pole... perhaps through my paintings I can disprove this myth. Saskatchewan's rich diversity of trees from the Cypress Hills in the south to the northern forests provides me with an infinite pallet from which to paint. No matter what province I am in there are always interesting trees that provide momentum for another painting. By exploring the strength, size and

rhythm of tree growth I create a representation of these magnificent structures. My paintings sometimes take on an accurate likeness of the subject. Other times I am more interested in capturing a mood or the essence of character. Each painting has to represent what I see, but also include something additional that I create from within myself. There is something intriguing about the turning, flowing and twisting of limbs. The nature of these structures has special appeal to me as a painter. I find that I am often painting trees without the foliage just to portray the character of the species.

Watercolour is my favourite medium. I like the way it flows and the clarity of it. Colour is an important element in my work. Blue is dominant in many of my paintings and represents the fragile environment in which these trees live and grow. It describes atmosphere, water, distant landscapes, and shadows on snow. Often I like to exaggerate colour and paint in layers to define depth and express a mood.

My intentions to broaden my subject matter are always good. A cityscape or cows in a pasture might be a nice change. Somehow the trees appear again in each painting; the cows enjoying the shade of an old maple, and the green foliage of natural stands along a riverbank framing the buildings of a busy downtown core. Maybe my work as an arborist spills over and locks the creative energy in one direction.

Trees are the spirit of our environment. They are symbolic that way. The prairies are abundant with trees, shrubs, grasslands and wildflowers. Old buildings and homesteads left abandoned in fields have new life as seedlings sprout up around them. The richness of colour in shades of green against blue skies, earthy textured bark, and a complex mix of shapes and

forms provide a never-ending supply of material to paint. There is a history of issues concerning the protection of the environment and the sustainability of our forests and grasslands. The natural resource industry, modern farming practices and urban development can change the landscape, reduce the benefits of nature, and endanger plant species. Within our cities the trees that make up the urban forest are compromised to make way for new buildings, growing subdivisions and wider streets. My art focuses on an awareness of our forests and the environment. It is about the beauty and the benefits that trees provide. Maybe this inspiration will encourage the protection of our existing forests, shelterbelts, and woodland stands. I want people to see the forest and the trees.

My works of art include some significant landmarks, interesting anomalies, and simply the beauty of trees. Unique trees, such as the gnarled and crooked aspen north of Hafford, Saskatchewan in "Twisted Trees", are a scientific mystery yet to be understood. The towering Edmonton Cottonwood in "Reach For The Sky" represents growth and endless possibilities. "In the Middle of No Where" was inspired by a drive to Moose Jaw one weekend. I spotted two towering silhouettes growing in the middle of an otherwise endless landscape of open fields. "Soul of a Tree" symbolizes nature as a living entity that is valuable and yet vulnerable within our environment. "Undercover" is the depiction of the beautiful American elm archways that grace many city streets. Some places seem to inspire creativity. The Rendek Forest in north eastern Saskatchewan has been one of my favorite places to paint. This stately elm forest with its undergrowth of lush ferns has been featured in three of my watercolour pieces and all of them sold immediately. Other people must also see

the uniqueness of that place! Unfortunately, this elm forest has seriously declined with the spread of Dutch elm disease. Hopefully the memories of this distinct ecosystem will live on through art.

I have done some investigating and found other arbourists hard at work creating art through the inspiration of trees. They are not only a subject to paint and draw but can be the medium itself. Retired arbourist Frank St. Pierre of Winnipeg has time now to dedicate to his craft of chainsaw carving. Bears, wolves, bison, eagles, and pelicans take shape from the remains of old trunks and limbs. "I can see the object in my mind even before I start to carve" he says. He also does smaller work from thick cottonwood bark. The mystical faces in the "Spirit of The Woods" series seem to be released as he carves, using the deep furrowed design of the bark to guide the expression. Dana Andersen is an arbourist with The City of Edmonton. He uses thin flat slabs of wood sliced from trunks as his canvas. After studying the patterns of the growth rings and stained wood he builds on the image he sees. The subject is sketched and then colour added with pencil crayon or acrylic paint. Dana's talents also include improv acting that transforms into a soap opera. He uses ideas from work inspired by his arbourist friends. You could say that trees and humour are the root of his success.

We, as arbourists can take the beauty and benefits of trees to a new level by capturing the value and memories of these living legacies. They are part of our heritage. The historic value can be recorded on canvas and in carvings and displayed for others to enjoy.



Saskatchewan 2006 DED Survey

by Steve Hyde, Saskatchewan Environment, Saskatoon

Several communities with a history of DED had no diseased trees in 2006. Kamsack, Carlyle, Tisdale, Grenfell, Balcarres, Caronport, Davidson and Melville were all DED-free this year. Significant decreases were also seen in Lumsden (12 infections this year, 32 last year) and Regina Beach (14/28). The communities of North Battleford, Saskatoon, Yorkton, Swift Current and Prince Albert remained DED-free. This year's survey found more infected trees in several communities, including Estevan (25/20), Carnduff (13/5), Wolseley (3/1), Fort Qu'Appelle (16/13) and Katepwa (59/49).

We can see the positive results of an active disease management program in many communities. Buffer zones have been established outside urban centres with significant elm populations in order to limit the movement of the disease. This year, infected trees were identified in the Regina, Moose Jaw, Estevan, Fort Qu'Appelle, Indian Head and Tisdale buffer zones. Many of the infected trees were removed this summer, with the remainder to be removed this fall and winter. This year, there are 40 communities participating in agreements with Saskatchewan Environment to share the cost of their programs, which may include spraying, pruning, staff training and public education.

Healthy elms have better resistance to infection. Homeowners should prune their trees regularly but observe the pruning ban from April 1 to August 31 each year. Because of the risk of spreading DED, transporting or storing elm firewood is illegal. For more information on proper DED management, call Saskatchewan

Environment's toll-free DED information line at 1-800-SASK ELM (1-800-727-5356).

The Tree at Windermere

By Don Kerr, Professor of English at the U. of S. and a founding member of SOS Elms

The tree at Windermere
is a joyous tree. It's a willow
with five main trunks.
It reaches to the sun, bends
to the earth. It's a green
fountain, diaphanous.
We can see through it
anywhere. It says grace.
It was here before the people
in the cabin. It will outlive us.
There are trees without number
on the hills over the lake.
They live in a crowd of trees,
a tangle of forest. The willow
stands on its own,
without competition yet sheltered
by poplars so the high winds,
in the valley of the Columbia
whistle off small branches
only. It shades the cabin.
It catches the light.
It keeps grass green
in a dry year.
It's tall as three houses,
wide as two houses.
It sends roots down
to the water table,
a stone's throw from the lake,
as beautiful as the lake,
without any sense
of our adulation,
tree our green joy,
rooting and bursting forth
each year. It says grace.

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DVD on Saskatoon's Elms

For the past year, with support from Saskatchewan Environment, Meewasin Valley Authority and interested citizens, Judith Benson has been making an archival video, "Saskatoon's Elms: a Legacy for the People and the Planet", for SOS Elms. We hope to see it completed in early 2007, when we will invite members for a viewing. It will be distributed as a DVD to communities throughout the province.

Man of the Trees Web Site

Paul Mantle, of Grass Valley, California, recently advised us about the launch of a memorial web site devoted to Richard St. Barbe-Baker (1889-1982), the "Man of the Trees". St. Barbe had a close connection to Saskatoon. He homesteaded at Beaver Creek in the early 1900s, was among the first students at the U. of S. and is buried at Woodlawn Cemetery.

See <http://www.manofthetrees.org>

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