SOS Trees Annual News

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SOS Trees Coalition, 1618 9th Ave N, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S7K 3A1
Web Site: www.sostrees.ca

What's Inside:

President's Report

Linda Moskalyk

Much was accomplished in 2024 by SOS Trees Coalition through the hard work of our board, members and volunteers. City Council finally passed **Saskatoon's Tree Protection Bylaw**, for which we lobbied for many years. This year we also worked with the City to improve specifications for **tree protection during construction**.

Dutch Elm Disease (DED) is now a reality in Saskatoon. Our organization began in 1992 because DED was spreading and killing American Elms in southeast Saskatchewan. Our first confirmed case of DED in Saskatoon didn't arrive till 2015. Since then we have had a few cases - but 2024 was devastating - we lost 18 beautiful American elms to DED! Infection sites were in five neighbourhoods. Saskatoon Urban Forestry moved quickly to remove infected trees. They work hard, in summer to search for signs of DED, and all year to find and properly dispose of illegal elm fire wood. Elm wood infected with DED from elsewhere, and brought here illegally as firewood, is the suspected cause of the increased DED infections.

As allies of Urban Forestry, we help to educate the public on how to identify and report suspected symptoms of DED on elms, and to report illegal storage of elm firewood. Representing SOS Trees, I am on the newly formed **Saskatoon DED Committee**, working closely with Urban Forestry and related groups to help in any way possible. Clearly, the provincial government must also play a bigger role in the control of DED. For example, the provincial lab in Regina which tests samples from elms suspected to have DED is essential in confirming the disease. Testing positive, the tree must be cut down and disposed of properly, to prevent it becoming a source of further infection. However, lack of adequate funding is limiting the lab's efficiency in serving Saskatoon and other communities with fast analyses of submitted samples. SOS Trees will be educating the public and lobbying government officials on this important issue. For more details on DED in Saskatchewan, see the articles below from the Saskatchewan Ministry of Environment and from STOPDED Alberta.

On other fronts, we continued to educate and inform the public with our **Arbor Week** celebration in May, and all year, through media interviews, social media and by posting digital news on our website www.sostrees.ca . We had a tree planting event during Arbor Week, and we assisted in planting trees with Meewasin and other community organizations. Getting more trees in the ground is of utmost importance for the future.

Planting trees during Arbor Week Photo by Linda Moskalyk

In September we sent two of our board members to the **Canadian Urban Forestry Conference** in Winnipeg (see Chad's report on page 6). These conferences are important in order to keep up to date on developments in urban forestry, and by personal networking with tree people across Canada on new ideas and solutions to common problems.

Revision of our Saskatoon Tree Tour Booklet for 2025 is underway, with an enlarged format, updated information and an improved selection of special trees, including new species. This booklet has become a popular way to involve residents in learning about trees, the history of Saskatoon's urban forest, and for home owners to learn about both common and unusual tree species that can be grown in Saskatoon.

With **a new City Council in place** this fall, and many new faces, it will be important to connect with our new Mayor and Councilors to ensure that they understand the importance of the urban forest and green spaces in a healthy city, why it's a priority for the whole community, and why Urban Forestry needs increased budget and staff.

Public education – providing information and answering inquiries continue to be a priority for us, through our events like **Arbor Day**, our participation in trade shows like **Gardenscape**, and our presence on **social media**. We must continue our work to encourage citizens, administrators, and politicians to see and appreciate the aesthetic, health and economic value of our urban forest. Protecting existing mature trees is essential, but we must also continue to encourage the planting of new trees on both public and private lands to help ensure a green future for Saskatoon.

In SOS Trees Board news, two of our longest serving members, Rae Hearn and Doug Mitchell, retired in 2024. See the article below on our tribute to them. We were pleased to add three new board members: Madeline Berezowski, Olita Elia, and Owen Tillie. Each of them has been volunteering in tree planting and other SOST projects in recent years. See below for Madeline's bio.

Thank you to everyone on our board and all of our members and supporters who participated or donated to our activities over the past year. We look forward to working with you in the 2025!

A beautiful mature American Elm in Avalon
Photo by Linda Moskalyk

New board member Madeline Berezowski

I grew up in the boreal forests of Whitehorse, Yukon, and have always felt a deep connection to trees and to nature in general. I moved to Saskatoon in 2013 to attend the University of Saskatchewan. I have a BSc Honours in Mathematical Physics with High Honours, a MSc in Physics, and am currently working on my PhD in Applied Mathematics.

I have been passionate about conservation volunteering since late summer in 2022, when I attended my first volunteer event with Meewasin - a tree-planting event at Chief Whitecap Park. I have volunteered for several local organizations, and currently volunteer primarily with SOS Trees, Meewasin, and The Wildlife Rescue Society of Saskatchewan. I am honoured and excited to have the opportunity to be on the Board of SOS Trees. I look forward to protecting and promoting Saskatoon's beautiful urban forest.

Canopy of fresh new green, King Crescent, May 21, 2024
Photo by Richard Kerbes

2024 Update on Dutch Elm Disease
– from Saskatchewan Ministry of Environment

In 2024, the Ministry of Environment's DED program activities included:

- DED surveys and removal of infected elms in eight rural management (buffer) zones;
- DED surveys in eight provincial parks;
- scientific and technical support to individuals and communities;
- support for municipal inspectors;
- reviewing applications to use elm wood or to import elm seedlings; and
- when required, enforcement of The DED Regulations.

During July and August, the ministry's contractor surveyed rural buffer zones adjacent to the following communities:

Balcarres	Moose Jaw
Estevan	Regina
Indian Head	Tisdale
Melfort	Wolseley

The survey identified a total of 564 DED infected trees, and all have now been removed by the ministry's tree removal contractor. The 2024 tree count is similar to 2023, when 558 infected trees were identified and removed. Management within the buffers protects adjacent communities from disease spreading from nearby rural lands. Landowners also benefit, as diseased elm trees are removed from their properties at no cost to them. The effectiveness of the program depends on the co-operation of landowners in the buffer areas, which is required under provincial legislation. Urban municipalities are responsible for DED management within their jurisdictions.

The Ministry of Environment continued to work with the Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport (PCS) to manage DED within provincial parks. In 2024, 22 diseased elms were identified within Echo Valley, Danielson, and Rowan's Ravine provincial parks. PCS removed the infected trees. This number is down from 2023, when 28 trees were removed.

DED is now established in Saskatchewan as far west as the Outlook area. The disease is spreading through rural communities, native elm stands, farmyards and shelterbelts, and the affected area continues to grow. In 2024, both Regina and Saskatoon had an increase in confirmed infections.

The Ministry of Agriculture's Crop Protection Lab continued to provide free sample testing to communities and the public. Samples from the following communities were confirmed as DED-positive:

Assiniboia	Indian Head	Saskatoon
Avonlea	Melfort	Strasbourg
Balcarres	Melville	Wapella
Carlyle	Moose Jaw	Weyburn
Churchbridge	Mossbank	Wolseley
Estevan	Outlook	Yorkton
Fillmore	Regina	

Below are actions that people can take to help prevent the spread of DED into their communities:

- Do not transport, sell, store or use elm firewood; it's against the law and one of the main ways that DED can spread.
- Dispose of elm wood properly at the site designated by your municipal authority.
- Prune elm trees to keep them healthy, outside the annual ban period (April 1 to August 31).
- Make sure the tree care professional you hire has the required training.
- Communities can help by appointing municipal DED inspectors to enforce the regulations within their municipality.

For more information about DED or other Ministry of Environment programs, visit Saskatchewan.ca/forestry and click the Forest Health tab, or contact the Inquiry Centre at 1-800-567-4224 or centre.inquiry@gov.sk.ca.

Note: for more information on DED in Saskatchewan, see the following report, from STOPDED Alberta.

STOPDED Alberta's take on the Saskatchewan DED situation

By Janet Feddes-Calpas
STOPDED Executive Director
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Editor's Note: STOPDED (The Society to Prevent Dutch Elm Disease) Alberta is a non-profit organization made up mainly of tree care professionals. Their mandate is to foster and promote the survival of the American elm in Alberta and to strive to protect Alberta's urban forests threatened by pests, with emphasis on DED and other invasive alien species. Alberta continues to be almost free of DED, and people there are very conscious of the risk of DED coming in from Saskatchewan. We thank Janet Feddes-Calpas for this article (slightly edited by me) which she wrote for STOPDED members.

It's important that we in Alberta know what Saskatchewan is up against when it comes to preventing and controlling DED. There is a lot to learn from their observations and experiences. We appreciate them sharing information.

At one time, DED was found only on the east side of Saskatchewan, other than isolated cases, but that has changed. The infected area goes from Cumberland House in the north to Assiniboia in the south; Melfort, Outlook and Moose Jaw in the west to the Manitoba border in the east. These areas all contain river systems with stands of native American elms. DED is now well established as far west as the Outlook area. In 2024 Saskatchewan had a sharp spike in cases across the province.

DED was found in Regina for the first time in 1981. A comprehensive prevention and control program was put in place immediately which includes designated DED staff, Elm Bark Beetle monitoring, DED surveys, elm tree pruning, immediate infected tree removal and fungicide injection. The city has always managed to keep their loss low each year.

In 2024, Regina had a bad year and **lost a total of 85 trees to DED** which is a lot higher than normal. For comparison 24 trees were lost in 2023. City crews started surveying earlier this year and were doing full time surveys before June 15th until September 1st. By the end of the summer, they had completed 4 full rounds throughout the city. They were looking at the areas where DED has been occurring and noticed a few "hotspots". It was found that it was old growth elms mostly affected in these hotspots.

Russell Eirich, City of Regina Manager, Open Space Services, feels that the rise in DED infected trees this year could be from the multi-year drought that has stressed out trees more than usual. Then when the rains did come in June, it allowed the disease to flush out and be more noticeable or recognizable. In July and August, a very hot dry summer was experienced. This sort of thing was noticed in City of Fredericton, New Brunswick, where DED cases increased in wetter periods.

Regina is continuing to work through a "hazard tree list' for removing non-DED infected elms which may create Elm Bark Beetle (the DED fungus carrier) harborage. Six official notices were delivered to residents to remove elm material. The City DED team is still following up on other locations with that regard. The IPM team also injected 74 elms with fungicide for neighboring trees to prevent spread by root grafting.

In Saskatoon, one DED infected elm tree was found for the first time in 2015. For a number of years, the city managed to stay DED free, but then:
2021- 1 positive tree
2022- 0 positive trees
2023- 4 positive trees in 3 neighborhoods.
2024- Cate Francis, City of Saskatoon Urban Forestry Superintendent, reported that Saskatoon had 11 positive test results in a fairly wide distribution across 5 neighborhoods. Two of these trees were private trees. Closely adjacent trees that were at risk of root transmission were also removed. **In total 18 trees (both public and private) were removed** as a direct result of positive tests.

Since Saskatoon is not considered within the endemic range of DED, the city focused on eradicating the disease from these areas by continued monitoring, rapid removal of infected trees, and increased firewood sweeps. City crews have been pulling a significant amount of illegally stored elm wood out of residential yards. Their communications plan is heavily focused on the risk of firewood.

Transported and stored infected elm firewood is still the most likely source for the movement of DED within and between municipalities and provinces. As elsewhere in Canada, in Saskatchewan it is illegal to store elm wood at any time of the year.

Incident in Saskatoon – Cache of Illegal Elm Firewood Discovered

On a late afternoon in October, 2024, a Resident of Saskatoon discovered that freshly cut blocks from one or more large trees were being unloaded from a truck into the back yard of a residence. On being advised that the wood was intended for use as firewood, the Resident checked the unloaded wood, and discovered that much of it was American Elm. Knowing that transporting and storing elm for firewood or other purposes is illegal, the Resident took photos of the wood (see below) and reported his findings online, using the City of Saskatoon's Web site on Dutch Elm Disease including the photos. The next day the Resident received a confirmation email from a City employee with Urban Biological Services, advising that said elm would be inspected that morning and any wood confirmed as elm would be disposed of properly. Later that day in midafternoon the Resident checked the site again and all of the elm was gone. Further details have not yet been reported by City authorities if any charges were laid, or if the source of the elm wood had been determined. This case shows how simple it can be for a citizen to be vigilant in spotting and reporting suspected elm wood.

Elm and other wood in blocks, cached at a residence in Saskatoon

Close up of cross-section of elm tree block, showing light and dark layers of outer bark, diagnostic for American Elm

Close up of freshly cut blocks of elm wood, showing attached leaves, diagnostic for American Elm

Canadian Urban Forestry Conference, Winnipeg, Oct. 15 – 18, 2024

Board members Chad Hammond and Robin Adair attended on behalf of SOS Trees. The following report is by Chad Hammond.

This Conference highlighted innovative approaches, challenges, and actionable strategies for protecting urban forests across Canada. The theme of the conference was Tree Equity, ensuring everyone has access to and benefits from the trees in their cities. The discussions focused on governance, community engagement, advocacy, and data-driven planning to foster sustainable urban environments.

1. Governance and Collaboration:
Strong governance structures and collaboration between stakeholders are central to successful urban forestry initiatives. Municipalities are increasingly implementing formal management plans that prioritize woodland monitoring, categorization, and both ecological and human-centered indicators of success. Collaboration between local governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) emerged as a critical factor, but challenges persist. Competing mandates, precarious funding, and shifting political priorities often disrupt relationships. Building partnerships that extend beyond a simple funder-recipient dynamic is essential. Clear roles, long-term agreements, and the development of mutual champions within organizations can enhance these collaborations. Moreover, fostering equity in decision-making ensures that diverse and underrepresented voices shape urban forestry strategies.

2. Community Engagement and Advocacy:
A key takeaway was the critical role of community engagement in advancing urban forest protection and growth. Successful initiatives often rely on connecting urban forestry to the specific values and priorities of different audiences. For businesses and policymakers, the economic benefits of urban trees—such as

energy cost reductions—can serve as compelling incentives. For conservation-focused groups, the environmental benefits may resonate most, while cultural or social connections to trees can be emphasized for community and spiritual groups. Creative approaches such as storytelling, public events, and interactive experiences can further engage diverse audiences, offering alternatives to traditional scientific messaging.

Grassroots advocacy also plays a vital role in promoting urban forest protection, influencing policies, and driving community stewardship. Advocacy efforts can include activities such as public letter-writing campaigns, targeted outreach to local decision-makers, and leveraging open data to demonstrate the tangible impacts of tree loss. Ensuring clear mandates and avoiding duplication of efforts among advocacy groups enables more effective action.

3. Inclusive and Equity-Focused Programming

Equity emerged as a central consideration in urban forestry initiatives. Cities are increasingly exploring methods to ensure tree planting and maintenance efforts target underserved and marginalized communities. This includes overlaying urban canopy data with measures such as income levels, heat vulnerability, and racialized population density to prioritize areas most in need of green infrastructure. Equity-focused strategies also emphasize engaging residents in sustainable actions, recognizing that private property often hosts significant portions of urban canopies. Ensuring these efforts account for community perspectives is key, as residents are often motivated by aesthetic and practical factors, such as low-maintenance tree species.

However, equity-focused programming faces barriers. For example, community stewardship efforts often struggle due to limited resources, capacity, or long-term funding. Addressing these challenges may require partnerships that provide ongoing support for maintenance and education programs. Transparent communication, accessible engagement methods, and inclusive decision-making processes are vital to creating urban forests that benefit all residents.

4. Data-Driven Planning and Management

The role of data in urban forestry is expanding as municipalities leverage tools to analyze and plan for urban canopy management. Geospatial data on species diversity, tree inventories, and urban heat islands provide valuable insights for planning and policy development. Data-driven strategies allow cities to identify priority areas for tree planting, understand their impact on heat reduction, and manage biodiversity within urban canopies. For instance, research shows that strategic tree placement—such as planting east-facing trees—can maximize energy savings and mitigate heat stress.

Despite these advancements, there remains a need for improved data standardization and accessibility. Many municipalities operate independently, with limited communication or alignment on policies like tree protection bylaws. Creating centralized platforms and databases for urban forestry data can improve consistency, facilitate knowledge sharing, and enable cities to adopt best practices more efficiently.

5. Sustainable Policy and Long-Term Vision

Ensuring the longevity of urban forestry efforts requires supportive policies and long-term strategies. Discussions emphasized the importance of tree protection bylaws, planting policies, and sustainable funding models. While municipalities vary widely in their approaches to enforcement and replacement ratios, there is an opportunity to develop standardized policies that balance ecological goals with practical considerations. Further, long-term agreements and funding commitments are essential to address the cyclical nature of urban forestry work, which often spans decades.

Sustainable urban forestry also requires community buy-in and stewardship. Programs that connect residents to their local forests through education, tree planting opportunities, and public events play a key role in fostering long-term care and appreciation for urban trees.

Conclusion

The conference highlighted that urban forestry is about more than planting trees—it is a holistic endeavor that requires collaboration, inclusivity, innovation, and strategic use of data. By fostering partnerships, engaging communities, and prioritizing equity, Canada's urban forests can thrive as vital assets that address environmental, social, and economic challenges. The path forward lies in creating adaptable, community-centered strategies that support resilient urban ecosystems for future generations.

A Legacy of Green: The Saskatoon Afforestation Areas

By Julia Adamson

Friends of the Saskatoon Afforestation Areas

Saskatoon's green spaces, including the Richard St. Barbe Baker Afforestation Area (RSBBAA) and the George Genereux Urban Regional Park, stand as symbols of the city's commitment to environmental restoration. These 326 and 148-acre spaces are vital wildlife havens and community retreats, with their preservation spearheaded by Friends of the Saskatoon Afforestation Areas (FoSAA).

In the 1960s, city planners envisioned these areas as a green belt, and by 1972, the city launched the Green Survival Program, planting saplings across 660 acres. However, by the mid-2010s, urban development and environmental decline posed threats. In 2016 and years following, FoSAA led a community effort to remove over 18,000 pounds of toxic and hazardous waste, revitalizing the afforestation areas. These efforts continued, and in 2020, the city approved its Green Infrastructure Strategy, aligning with FoSAA's mission. Further supporting these efforts, $100,080 from Canada's Climate Action and Awareness Fund enabled FoSAA's Green Vision project, which installed barriers to prevent illegal dumping and protect the areas' ecological integrity, which has proven successful.

Children on a Trees and Nature walk
at St. Barb Baker Afforestation Area
Photo by Julia Adamson

By 2024, these areas are safe and thriving. The city secured investments from the Government of Canada's Natural Infrastructure Fund (NIF). A total of $430,500, including $234,900 from NIF, helped develop an ecological assessment and master plan for RSBBAA. In addition to enhanced biodiversity, sustainable trails and waste management upgrades have improved accessibility and visitor experience.

The city's restoration efforts also address the growing threat of invasive species, such as Dutch Elm Disease and the Emerald Ash Borer. To combat these, a diverse mix of tree species, including the planting of nearly 1,800 native trees and shrubs—Manitoba Maple, Trembling Aspen, Balsam Poplar, and Bur Oak among the tree species — were planted in the fall of 2024, bolstering the afforestation areas' resilience.

This investment in green spaces reflects Saskatoon's commitment to combating climate change, improving biodiversity, and providing residents with access to nature. As part of the Green Network Project, through NIF, the city secured $34 million for over 20 initiatives aimed at enhancing the region's climate resilience.

FoSAA's recent accreditation by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) marks a new chapter, amplifying local conservation efforts on the global stage. The collaboration between the city, government, the United Nations and community organizations ensures that these afforestation areas will thrive for generations to come.

Explore Saskatoon's winter wonderland and celebrate our green spaces!

Join us at these exciting upcoming events:

- **Wednesday, January 22**, 2025: The Saskatchewan Council for International Cooperation (SCIC) and Friends of the Saskatoon Afforestation Areas Inc. present Global Connections: Urban Forest Guardians Protecting Saskatoon's Natural Heritage.
  5:00 pm to 7:00 pm Amigos Cantina 806 Dufferin Avenue, Saskatoon, SK,
- **April 25 – April 28**, 2025: City Nature Challenge: Trees fortify endemic wildlife habitat! Learn more: www.friendsareas.ca

Frosty Elm Photo by K. Meeres

Silver Maple leaf detail Photo by Cliff Speer

Tribute to Rae Hearn and Doug Mitchell

By Richard Kerbes

Two of our longest serving board members retired from the SOS Trees Coalition Board in 2024. I first met Rae Hearn a year or two after our Coalition began in 1992. Rae was one of our early members who volunteered for staffing our booth at a big public exposition at the newly built Sask Place arena (now the Sasktel Centre). Rae very ably interacted with the public about trees and our mission, bringing her four young sons along to help out. By 1995 Rae had joined our Board as Secretary, serving in that role for almost 20 years, plus assisting in our projects. Meanwhile, in the late 90s her husband, Doug Mitchell, became an active member and volunteer, especially in organizing volunteers and staffing our annual display at Gardenscape. Doug went on to lead us as President from 2008 to 2013. Rae and Doug stored our archives and hosted our Board meetings in their home for many years. They were key organizers for our AGMs and hosted our annual fund raising yard sales at their home until 2024.

Rae and Doug, our SOS Trees board sincerely thanks you for your many years of dedicated and enthusiastic service to our goals. We wish you many years of enjoying your retirement.

SOS Elms Coalition Inc. Board of Directors

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This newsletter edited by Richard Kerbes and Kathy Meeres

SOS Trees new/renewal membership form:

☐ $20.00 Annual membership per household

☐ $0.00 Student membership

☐ $_____Donation

$_____Total - (tax receipt will be mailed to you)
Money order or cheque enclosed
(Payable to SOS Trees Coalition)

☐ Yes! I wish to help out as a volunteer

SOS TREES
COALITION

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1618 9th Ave. N,
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If this is a renewal, please update your contact information if there have been any changes.

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Our website: http://sostrees.ca/