

## Nature Notes, May 2023

### Celebrating Urban Forests in Saskatchewan

By Tom Gode

Urban forests, the trees in our towns and cities, are an essential asset in dealing with our changing climate. The urban forest absorbs greenhouse gas emissions which helps slow global temperature rise; it also reduces air temperatures through both shade and evapotranspiration, combating the urban heat island effect and helping address extreme heat events. Historically, Saskatoon has benefited from the foresight of civic leaders and citizens who saw the value of an urban forest, spreading its canopy over much of the city. Our non-profit advocacy group, SOS Trees Coalition (<https://www.sostrees.ca/>), was founded in 1992 by a few concerned citizens, alarmed and motivated by the arrival of Dutch elm disease (DED) into southeast Saskatchewan. DED is fatal to the American elm, the most common species in the mature neighborhoods of our communities.

Our group successfully lobbied the provincial and civic governments to increase budgets and expand tree care programs to better protect the American elm and manage DED in Saskatoon and other Saskatchewan communities. From there we have gradually expanded our goals to promote the care, understanding and appreciation of all species of the urban forest. We advocate for responsible stewardship and community involvement through, for example, supporting residents to save green spaces in their neighbourhoods, holding educational events, taking part in climate actions, and working with other organizations to ensure that we continue to have a healthy urban forest and an environment in which all of us can work, live and play.

Arbor Week was proclaimed by the Province of Saskatchewan and the City of Saskatoon in 2020 as an annual celebration of and tribute to urban trees. SOS Trees Coalition has taken the lead in organizing Arbor Week events. This year Arbor Week 2023 occurs May 20-28 and consists of over 20 free educational events celebrating trees throughout the city. For details and a complete schedule of events go to <https://sostrees.ca/arborweek.html>. The Arbor Week theme this year is “Healthy



**The Saskatoon urban forest when viewed from a balloon.**

Photo by Stephen J. Nicolson

Trees, Healthy People”. Workshops to promote appreciation of trees will include tree pruning, photography of trees, yoga in the trees, and a spirituality session in the forest. As well, we will have a film night at the Remail, a self-guided QR Code audio tree tour, a webinar in partnership with the U of S, and a plein air art making event under the trees. The Saskatoon libraries will have a week of tree-themed storytelling for families.

Other local organizations such as Meewasin Valley Authority, Friends of the Saskatoon Afforestation Areas, and Saskatoon Nature Society will join in with their own tree activities. The cornerstone event will be a blitz to plant trees and other plants for a natural area at Sutherland School. This planting project will be done in collaboration with specialists providing advice in plant selection, design and site preparation. Working with children and teachers helps them understand the purpose of growing trees and gives practical, hands-on experience at planting. Planting a tree empowers children to realize that they can make a difference for their community, wildlife, and the environment. We invite everyone to come out to celebrate Arbor Week with us, and be part of getting more trees in the ground and expanding Saskatoon’s urban forest canopy!

*Tom Gode is a Board Member of SOS Trees Coalition and writes for the Saskatoon Nature Society.*