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Preserving Nature's Legacy: The Journey with Saskatoon's Afforestation Areas

By Julia Adamson

Nestled within the heart of Saskatoon lie two hidden treasures, the Richard St. Barbe Baker Afforestation Area (RSBBAA) 326 acres and the George Genereux Urban Regional Park (GGURP) 148 acres. Established in 1972 as part of a grand vision to create a greenbelt around the city, these afforestation areas have since evolved into vital ecological and heritage assets for Saskatoon.

Friends of the Saskatoon Afforestation Areas Inc. (FSAA) emerged in 2015 from a shared concern for the neglected and abandoned precious green spaces. Initially a loosely knit group of individuals, FSAA quickly gained momentum, driven by a common goal - to protect and restore the afforestation areas' ecosystems.

The journey towards preservation has been one of resilience and collaboration. In 2017, stakeholders gathered for a community meeting, laying the foundation for FSAA's 2020 Green Vision. With a unified vision in hand, FSAA formalized its status as a provincial non-profit and registered charity in 2019, cementing its commitment to the cause.

Central to FSAA's mission is the fulfillment of a promise made by City Council in 1972 - to preserve these areas "in perpetuity." This pledge spurred FSAA into action, securing government grants to erect barriers against illegal trespass and dumping, and installing park identification signage to enhance safety for both the ecosystem and park users.

Since its inception, FSAA has been instrumental in transforming the afforestation areas into thriving havens for biodiversity and recreation. FSAA initiated over ten community clean-ups removing over 72,190 kg of toxic waste, reclaiming the land for its intended purpose.

But FSAA's efforts extend beyond conservation; they're also dedicated to education and community engagement. From developing educational packages, heritage documentaries, journal and conference articles, to creating Prairie Forest Guide self-guided interpretive tours, FSAA endeavors to inspire a deeper appreciation for these natural sanctuaries.

The City Nature Challenge, CNC YXE 2024 is an annual global initiative aimed at documenting urban biodiversity. From April 26 to April 29, 2024, FSAA joins forces with the Saskatoon Nature Society for data collection and observation, followed by the identification phase April 30 to May 5, results May 6.

FSAA continues to document and protect the rich biodiversity within the afforestation areas, with over



Winter Scene at Richard St. Barbe Baker Afforestation Area.

Photo by Julia Adamson

50 species at risk documented to date. Over 35 tree species have been catalogued, including 10 hardy drought-resistant species recommended by the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration (PFRA) to city parks in 1972 when the afforestation areas started as tree nurseries under the Green Survival Program.
<https://shorturl.at/juzAU>

FSAA engages with the local community through events and initiatives, such as Jane's Walk, Arbor Week initiated by SOS Trees, CoS Doors Open Saskatoon, GoC Historic Places Days, and programs during National Forest Week. The dedication of FSAA to preserving Saskatoon's natural heritage extends to advocating for a proclamation in Saskatoon for National Forest Week and hosting environmental events around Canada's Maple Leaf Day in September.

With unwavering determination and collective support, developing the 2030 Vision, honouring the namesakes of Saskatoon's hidden gems, FSAA continues to forge ahead, preserving nature's legacy for generations to come.

Join us in our mission to protect and restore Saskatoon's afforestation areas. Together, we can make a difference.

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<http://www.friendsareas.ca/>*