Urban Forestry in Manitoba

What is an Urban Forest?

Urban forests are the trees, shrubs and plants that grow in and around our urban centres on boulevards, in private yards, in parks, and wild areas. This green infrastructure is elemental to making our communities more livable places.

Early Manitoba settlers recognized the value of trees to urban spaces. As noted in *Manitoba History: The Greening of the West: Horticulture on the Canadian Prairies, 1870-1930*, by Lyle Dick, European settlers planted trees collected from wild riverbank areas in what were, at the time, sparsely treed areas to beautify their surroundings, protect their farmsteads from the wind, and provide psychological security:

"Civic beautification became entrenched in the 1890s when business leaders and urban reformers pressured city authorities to introduce urban parks and a coordinated approach to boulevard planting. Between 1893 and 1914, twenty-seven civic and three private parks were established within the city of Winnipeg. The prototypes for these parks and their counterparts in other prairie cities were usually a combination of English picturesque and formal Victorian landscaping conventions, and functioned to inculcate the British connection in the emerging prairie society."

Early image (approx. 1910) of Carlton School in Winnipeg(Rob McInnes Postcard Collection)

Benefits of Urban Forests

Early settlers planted trees along streets to help provide protection from harsh prairie climatic conditions of extreme heat, cold, and wind. Today, these trees not only increase our comfort, but they also help decrease energy costs associated with heating and cooling homes and buildings.

- reducing run-off in urban areas, mitigating extreme weather events with heavy rainfall amounts
- removing dust particles and pollutants from the air
- making urban places more livable by beautifying neighborhoods and parks
- providing habitat for animals and birds
- providing important outdoor recreation and learning opportunities

Threats to Urban Forests

Today's urban forests face many challenges. Towns and cities do not always provide ideal growing conditions for trees. Trees are often forced to grow in areas where there is more pavement than soil, such as boulevards. The soils are compacted and do not contain the nutrients trees need. Additionally, urban trees may be damaged by street salts, air and water pollution, and vandalism.

Urban trees are also affected by native forest pests and diseases. Because urban areas often lack diversity in plantings, forest pest and disease outbreaks can be even more damaging to urban forests than wild forests.

Tree damaged by road salt/picture (Joseph O'brien, USDA Forest Service, Bugwood.org)

Increasingly, urban forests are being threatened by invasive forest pests and diseases. Dutch elm disease, an introduced disease of elms, devastated elm populations in Europe and North America. First detected in Manitoba in 1975, Dutch elm disease likely came here through infested firewood. But other invasive forest threats could also be introduced to Manitoba through infested materials like firewood.

Michigan Ash tree killed by emerald ash borer(David Cappaert, Michigan State University, Bugwood.org)

Urban Forestry Related Links

- City of Winnipeg: http://www.winnipeg.ca/publicworks/parksOpenSpace/UrbanForestry/default.stm
- Canadian Urban Forest Network: http://www.cufn.ca/
- Tree Canada: https://treecanada.ca/en/resources/benefits-trees/