

Challenges for Tree Management in Towns and Summer Villages



Urban Forestry Management

All of Alberta's large urban centres have developed several programs and incentives to sustain overall healthy, vigorous, and attractive forests in their communities. They have long term tree care, maintenance, planting programs, and well-defined policies with funding and staff to support their practices.

In contrast, majority of small rural communities have not developed any tree management programs. Potential benefits of trees are often not included in their planning. This results in many towns and summer villages not seeing their trees as an asset. Unfortunately, even when small communities want to try including tree and forestry management into their practices there can be multiple challenges standing in their way.



Tree and forest characteristics in small rural communities



Although tree topping is common it can significantly decrease the lifespan of the tree.



Root collar damage is an entry point to many fungi that can destroy roots and stems.

Looking into some of the challenges facing trees in rural towns and summer villages

Tree topping/heading under overhead utilities: Many trees are planted without consideration for overhead utilities. Because of this trees end up needing to be "topped". This practice puts stress on the trees and makes them vulnerable to insect and disease attacks.

Low tree diversity: Up to 90% of street or boulevard trees are occupied just by one or two tree species. A larger variety of tree species would increase the resilience of the urban green space.

High older aged tree distribution: Majority of trees belong to the same age group. They are mature (or over mature) and reaching the critical age where their health and vigor decline rapidly.

Improper tree planting: Many newly planted trees are improperly planted without any consideration of the "right tree on the right place" principles. This can mean that things like tree species, spacing, and planting depth were not taken into consideration.

Root damage: This can be caused by things such as soil compaction due to high traffic or root cuttings by lawn mowers. Using a tree guard is one way to reduce this damage

Lack of tree care: There is often a significant number of trees with dead or dying branches, lawnmower damage, and minimal mulching protection.

Non-native invasive shrubs: Non-native invasive shrub species such as caragana or sea buckthorn spread into the understory of forests killing natural shrub vegetation. This greatly reduces the biodiversity of the natural forest.

Constraints on tree and forest management in small rural communities

There are several causes for the state of trees and forests in rural communities

Lack of tree inventory: Often there are no tree inventories to identify the number of trees, tree species, or hazardous trees. Many communities do not even know which trees belong to them legally.

Lack of human resources:

The majority of rural communities do not have any full or part-time staff dedicated to tree care or maintenance.

Lack of political and management support: Many leaders may not be aware of the economic, environmental, and social values that trees and forests provide to their communities. This can lead to a lack of forestry related programming.

Lack of tree policies and bylaws: Many residents will cut or prune trees on public lands without any permits. Lack of bylaws lead to tree vandalism in public places.

Lack of financial support: Often rural communities have a low population and a small corresponding tax base. Many leaders face challenges to maintain crucial infrastructure; therefore, allocating dollars towards forestry needs can be seen as a low priority

Lack of provincial and federal government support programs:

Provincial and federal forestry departments have no forestry staff dedicated to providing technical support to rural communities. There is no long-term funding for trees or forestry in rural communities.

Possible strategies for improvement



Allocate funds to provide basic training for staff and encourage volunteer involvement.



Educate local leaders, staff, and the general public about trees and how to care for them.



Conduct a basic tree inventory to gather the number of trees, tree species ID and overall health.



Consider creating your own nursery to supply trees and shrubs to the town.

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