

## Green Scene: Celebrate our Trees on Earth Day

by Elaine Golds

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From my childhood, I fondly remember my grandmother's cross-stitched embroidery which she had framed and hung for display. It was a copy of Joyce Kilmer's well-known poem, "I think that I shall never see a poem as lovely as a tree". While some have criticized Kilmer's work for being maudlin, as a child, I was impressed by his appreciation of trees. As we celebrate Earth Day (April 22) this weekend, such poetry should also serve to remind us of the many reasons we have to value our trees.

In a region that can produce some of the most magnificent temperate rainforests on the planet, it seems all too easy to take trees for granted. After all, trees grow here, seemingly, like weeds. Like magic, any abandoned plot of land ignored for a few years will soon sprout some alder. If allowed to grow for a few years, this alder will enrich the soil for the next generation of trees and slowly transform into a grand forest of giant conifers. As a prairie person, I had never heard of the term "trash tree" until I moved to the coast. It was even more surprising to learn this term was typically applied to one of our most valuable trees, the red alder, which fixes nitrogen into the soil, stabilizes streambanks and sustains an astonishing variety of wildlife.

Indeed, trees have a large number of attributes, many of which are now called "ecosystem services". As trees grow, their roots help to keep soil in place, an especially valuable benefit on steep hillsides in a region of high rainfall. Trees provide shade and help to create cool spaces within the urban environment. Through the process of photosynthesis, trees produce copious amounts of oxygen which every animal on earth, including ourselves, needs to survive. Trees help to purify our air, reduce urban noise, add beauty to our neighborhoods and support many species of wildlife including birds, small mammals and countless beneficial insects. A 2010 report from the David Suzuki Foundation and Pacific Parklands Foundation estimated a value of \$5,900 per hectare per year for the ecosystem services provided by mature secondary forests.

In these contemporary times of global warming, trees also provide the vital service of storing carbon. In fact, they remain as one of the best and most effective methods to remove carbon from the atmosphere and store it in a most pleasing and serviceable form.

Approximately 50% of a tree by weight is carbon. As much as we humans have tried to create advanced technologies to capture and sequester carbon, there is still no better option than the simple act of planting trees. And followed, of course, by allowing them to grow in place for many years.

I have thus been dismayed to see our local governments seemingly forget about the value of mature trees.

**Can the loss of so many mature trees at Glen Park be justified? *J. Thomsing photo.***



In Coquitlam, despite considerable public interest in a tree protection bylaw, Council approved the removal of over 150 mature trees in Glen Park, a pocket forest of incomparable value in a rapidly growing area of the City. Something was wrong with the consultation process if the value of this forest was not properly documented or presented to the public. In Port Moody, their Council is proposing to build a new fire hall over a stream which will also require the removal of some mature trees from a signature forest near City Hall. Also in Port Moody, a proposed expansion of soccer fields could result in the loss of many mature trees in the Shoreline Park forest. The construction of the much-needed Evergreen skytrain line will also eliminate many trees which have grown up along the railway corridor in Port Moody and Coquitlam in past years. Surely, we should be doing a better job at finding ways to meet our needs without having to cut down so many mature trees in our neighborhoods. The green canopy of our community is what attracted many people to live here in the first place. What sort of treeless legacy will we be leaving for future generations?

On this Earth Day weekend, there are two events which will allow families to enjoy the outdoors including one of our loveliest urban forests. On Saturday morning, the Friends of DeBoville Slough are hosting a guided nature walk to enjoy birds at DeBoville Slough along its partially tree-lined banks. This walk will depart from the intersection of Victoria and Cedar Drives at 9:30 am. On Sunday afternoon at 1 pm, the Riverview Horticultural Centre Society will hold one of their monthly tree tours on the Riverview Hospital grounds. With the magnolias now in bloom, this is one of best seasons to enjoy western Canada's most magnificent tree collection which features specimens from the all tree-growing continents on the planet. Follow the colourful banners through the site on Holly Drive to the meeting place or see [www.rhcs.org](http://www.rhcs.org) for details.