

LIGHTS and SHADOWS

from the
Dishman Hills

November 2004

TIS THE SEASON

Tis the season for holidays, cold winds from the north, and indoor life. Many experience a little stress this time of the year. But in case you haven't noticed, you should know that our natural spaces are also under a lot of stress. They are being assaulted on many fronts by forces that are both big and small, local and global, and both fast and slow. The Dishman Hills, being an urban natural area, are quite familiar with this stressful situation. Let's do a little stress analysis on our forest, and pretend that we can put a tree down on the couch and ask it how are things going. Initial complaints involve the invasion of more and more humans tramping around crushing the thousands of smaller plants that hold the forest floor together. Without them the life-giving soils will be washed away and one could lose their grip and fall over. These noisy things often bring with them smaller beasts that chase, scare and sometimes even kill many of the little animals that have been part of the neighborhood for thousands of years. They sometimes bring with them metal objects that propel them faster through the area or are sharp and can cut. Most scary, sometimes they bring paint or even fire! When they leave, often they leave behind strange objects that remind us that they were there and will be back.

Deeper analysis brings out additional stress. Slower but very noticeable are the changes in the seasons and the all important rainfall. Things are warming up and a tree can get quite thirsty. We can change, states the tree, but not as fast as changes are occurring. Moving is out of the question. There is something different about the air, it's full of strange smells, some of which are making us feeling a little weak. Frankly, the tree admits, this stress has allowed us to be more susceptible to what you call parasites and infestations, like bark beetle. Quite embarrassing! To top it all, there are strange, unfamiliar plants moving into the neighborhood that seem not to mind these changes. As the patient begins to open up the deepest fears come out. He admits that there are rumors that over the hill there is no forest at all, and many of the animals that leave never come back. They say over there nothing grows, like it's the end of the world. Can this be! Will this happen here!

The patient has vented its worst fears but can this stress be relieved? Our Association is active with a forest protection and stress reduction program but we can use your help. This holiday season, if you spy a lonely bush or a frightened tree, walk right up to it and assure it things will be all right, and if it's coniferous or still doing photosynthesis, give it a nice warm breath of cheerful holiday CO₂ and maybe spill a little of your holiday drink on its roots. We can share a future together and hand in branch move forward. Happy Holidays.

TREE OF THE SEASON

Perhaps the most popular tree in the United States during the Holiday season is the Douglas fir, much used as a Christmas tree. It was named for David Douglas, Scotch botanist who explored for plants in the Pacific Northwest. A sure way to identify the tree is to examine the cone. Between the scales project three-pointed bracts, with the middle point the longest. Some say it looks like the back end of a small mouse, two legs and a tail, trying to squeeze between the scales. On older trees the thick, deeply grooved bark protects the tree quite well from ground fires. Doug firs like more moisture than the ponderosa pine, but less sunshine. In the Dishman Hills these trees can be found in the bottom of ravines such as the Enchanted Ravine where they are well protected from sun and hot winds.

WINTER TALE

The following article was published in the Lights and Shadows in November, 1976, and written by Tom Rogers. Enjoy.

The first snow of the winter will soon sift down blanketing the ground. To enjoy it you don't have to be a skier. It can awaken the child that still slumbers within us, if we only let it. The whiteness of unbroken snow in the morning, covering the dust and muffling the noise of everyday life, can give our spirits a lift. For wild things winter makes life difficult, sometimes impossible. Visiting the Hills you likely will come upon the wandering tracks of a cottontail rabbit looking for a breakfast of tender bark. Watch out, bunny, for here are dog-like tracks, but neater, narrower, in nearly a straight line, a coyote is also hungry. When the snow goes deep he may often go foodless, as mice scurry safely through their white tunnels. In a ravine we may find a pile of cone scales from a Douglas fir. It's a pine squirrel's dinner table. He likely is watching you from a branch above. Perhaps you will come upon the long-stride tracks of a white tailed deer. The quail may have a difficult time if snow is deep but they quickly eat grain tossed out to them by sympathetic human neighbors. Ruffed Grouse are quite at home with winter as they eat dried fruits and buds of conifers and dive into a snowbank for the night. Overhead the feathered inhabitants do better. Searching for insects amongst the branches are chickadees, nuthatches, and golden-crowned kinglets. Working the tree trunks are occasional brown creepers. High up in the tops are reed crossbills and pine siskins digging seeds from cones of fir and pine.

ORGANIZATION NEWS

We are a non-profit organization dedicated to saving nature areas in the Spokane region for public enjoyment and education. Call Michael Hamilton, 747-8147, if you have any questions. We meet every other month on the third Tuesday at Opportunity Elementary School, S. 1109 Wilbur, in the teacher's lounge, 7pm. Our next meeting, our annual election of officers, will be January 18th.

The following are our October donors that have consented to be listed: Andrew Ashmore, Bill Fix, Jim Fox, Kathryn Mann, Pat & Ruth Manners, Asha Rehnberg, Julie Rosenoff, Jeanne Wilson, Nan Smith, Art Zack, and one anonymous donor. Thank you.

Where flowers degenerate man cannot live — Napoleon Bonaparte

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