

Tree Talk

What Do Your Street Trees Look Like?



For the past several years, the Division of Resource Conservation and Forestry has been taking an inventory of trees along the boulevards and street rights of way in a pre-selected number of communities throughout South Dakota. The purpose of the inventories is to identify the diversity, age, and condition of the community forests across the state. Since it would be impractical to inventory all the communities across the state, we have randomly selected a sample of communities to gather data from. From these inventories we can create a database that not only gives the communities a working inventory of their street trees, but allows us to use the data to help establish additional funding and assistance in the state urban and community forestry program.

Though we still have communities to inventory for 2005 before having a complete sample of data for our final report, we do have very good preliminary information. Approximately 10,000 trees have been inventoried so far. The most common species used as a street tree is green ash. This does not come as a surprise, but does show that we have not grasped the idea of diversifying our tree species when planting new trees. This information is important because of insect and disease issues that can move in and devastate a monoculture, such as what happened with the American Elm and Dutch Elm Disease. The emerald Ash Borer is an Asian insect discovered in Michigan several years ago that is now devastating ash populations. Once it arrives in South Dakota, we can expect to lose most of our green ash. We expect it will be worse than Dutch Elm Disease. The inventory data we are gathering will help support our effort in informing South Dakota residents about the importance of diversifying tree species when planting trees.

We are also finding that street tree populations in South Dakota are mature or over mature. The condition of our street trees is approximately two-thirds in good to fair condition, and about one-third in poor condition. Surprisingly, about 3 percent of the inventoried street trees are standing dead. The South Dakota inventory project is helping communities spot trends, create long-term plans and realistic budgets for tree management and the scheduling of regular maintenance and tree care.

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