



Neighbours as Stewards: From Two to Ninety-Two

By Polly Lee Knowlton Cockett

You are never too old or too young to join in on shared stewardship of the natural spaces within our community. Consider Louise and Richard Guy, local residents and nonagenarians also known for their annual efforts climbing the 802 steps of the Calgary Tower multiple times in support of the Alberta Wilderness Association. These truly inspiring seniors were two of many who came out to help garden and weed in Whispering Woods and the Centennial Natureground in Brentwood Heights over the summer.

Thank you so much to all who joined us these past months, whether you were local, from a nearby neighborhood, or were visiting from another province or country and were unwittingly dragged along with your hosting weeders of the wild west. Whether it was weekly Wednesday evenings, monthly weekend mornings, or as inspired by the weather and your own wanderings, we had especially good attendance when we planned for post-pulling potluck parties!

Many of our youngest are especially good at caring for the areas around the new Whispering Signs, especially the shorter alphabet signs at their eye level. Tristan B., age 2 plus, has been coming to the Natureground in the summers ever since she was in utero, when the Natureground was first created. Some people weed away on their own time, perhaps as they are

walking along to another destination. Some come to the organized workbees for several hours, some for a few minutes, and others just for the yummy treats and good company afterwards. All are welcome and wanted.

Some weeds are effectively controlled by pulling, especially before they go to seed. Goat's beard is one of these, and there has been a marked decrease in the population of this species every year since we started pulling it. The dandelion-like taproot of this plant is best pulled when stiffer, just before or as it is flowering. The milky sap is sticky, so take care to protect your clothing. In all cases, weeds should be bagged and/or placed in the trash rather than composted. Just as with many plants, the buds can flower and go to seed even after being picked or pulled, and very few compost heaps in Calgary get hot enough to render the seeds and propagating roots unviable.

Other weeds do not respond well to pulling, and their reproducing root systems are even strengthened by such action. Creeping bellflower, thistles, and alien grasses are such plants. Infestations of these are best controlled by a combination of methods designed to weaken the plant colonies so they can no longer out compete their native plant neighbors. Judicious use of biodegradable herbicides can be a part of managing natural areas to preserve and restore



native biodiversity. Such careful, restrained, and preemptive use should not be confused with the lobby to ban cosmetic pesticides in Calgary. If you cannot remove such plants in a timely manner, it is still useful to remove the flowers and seed heads so as not to contribute an additional unwanted contribution to the windblown and soil seed bank.

Early Detection and Rapid Response, EDRR, in your own yards and gardens is critical to preventing these and other ornamental escapees into the commons. Ecological restoration of our natural spaces, on small and large scales, in our neighborhoods and on a global scale, is of paramount importance to preserving and conserving the world's native and place-based biodiversity. Please visit the Alberta Invasive Plant Council's website, www.invasiveplants.ab.ca, as well as the Alberta Native Plant Council website, www.anpc.ab.ca, for more information on how to promote natives and dissuade alien invaders.

Please contact me at environews@shaw.ca if you would like to be added to a listserve for future community plant gatherings. Together we can make a difference.

