

# Conservation in Action

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## SOMETHING NEW IN FORESTRY

Saskatchewan has something new in forestry. It started in May in the tiny, forest-fringe village of Christopher Lake, and, before very long, it may prove to be only the forerunner of a larger movement. Such, at least, is the fervent hope of Conservation Officer Al Fremont, founder-leader of the first Forestry 4-H Club in the province.

While new to Saskatchewan, the "Forestry 4-H Club" idea is already well established in the Province of Quebec, where some 10,000 teen-age members are working diligently to promote the importance and value of forest conservation . . .

Since their first meeting, much has been accomplished by the fifty boys and girls of the Christopher Lake Forestry 4-H Club. Trees have been planted; trees and shrubs have been identified, and many of the uses to which wood is put have been learned. Just recently an Achievement Day was held. Beautiful exhibits of leaves, twigs, bark and wood were on display to testify to the interest and diligence of the members. Examinations, too, on various aspects of forestry were written and results generally revealed a high degree of knowledge, considering the comparatively short time the club had been in existence.

Support from the community at large has not been lacking either. Mrs. R. Summers, a local resident, donated a quarter-section of woodland to the club to serve as a "practical workshop."

## A FOREST ON THE PRAIRIE

by ALEX DICKSON, Prince Albert

A forest on the prairie! Unbelievable perhaps, but the living proof is there for all to see eighteen miles northwest of Kindersley, Saskatchewan. There, in the middle of a huge P.F.R.A. cattle pasture is an eight-acre "forest" of exotic pine trees.

Now over twenty feet high and generally in a thrifty condition, the trees—a Finish strain of Scotch pine—were planted by the local municipi-

pality in 1938 on the recommendation of its secretary, Mr. W. H. Howes. Mr. Howes, who took me to the plantation two or three months ago, told me how the results have confounded the critics. Most of the experts he consulted, he said, were opposed to the plan and assured him at its inception of complete failure. The various natural factors involved certainly did not give much cause for optimism: the long-term average rainfall was only ten inches per annum, while the existing vegetation was typical of the so-called "high prairie" with trees very conspicuous by their absence.

During his many years of farming in the area, however, Mr. Howes had shrewdly observed that the plants on the lighter soils were most able to make use of the limited precipitation and that land with a northerly exposure suffered least the effects of warm, drying winds. Thus it was with a certain degree of confidence that he selected the site for his tree planting project, which was intended as much as anything to boost the morale of the local farmers passing through the worst period of drought in their history.

Preparation of the site was essentially simple: furrows were ploughed at five-foot intervals along the contours, and in those the trees were planted by hand at a similar spacing. The area was then protected against rabbits and livestock by means of a double fence. A shelterbelt of North west Poplars was planted on the west side of the block at the time the pine were set in the ground, and the fast growing poplars have afforded a measure of protection to the evergreens. No inter-row cultivation to keep down weeds was done after the trees were planted; indeed, Mr. Howes largely attributes the success of the venture to a profuse growth of Russian thistle, which held the snow on the plants in the winter and which prevented the growth of grass which would have offered strong competition for the young trees.

Not every tree that was planted has grown, but those that have survived have certainly brought about a remarkable transformation of the



environment. The tough, dry grasses of the original prairie have been smothered with a resilient carpet of sedges while the sickly-sweet smell of the sage has given way to the refreshing fragrance of the resinous pines. Liverworts, mosses and other tropical forest plants are beginning to make their appearance. Most amazing of all, however, is the natural regeneration of the Scotch pine itself. It is very unusual for a tree, out of its natural range, to reproduce itself, but, in this instance, sturdy seedlings are springing up all over the area wherever there is an adequate opening in the overhead canopy. Mr. Howes also claims that the tall grass growing inside the fences of the now-scarce "sweet" grass of the prairie on which the buffalo used to feed.

Man, animals and the elements have taken their toll of the trees so that only seventy-five per cent of those that were planted remain. Inevitable neighbours stole some of the seedlings in the early years and porcupines have stripped the bark off several stems. Snow, too, has caused

some of the trees to bend over and break. While the gaps and damage in the plantation tend to make the stand a little ragged, Mr. Howes is not too concerned since he has in mind a thinning programme for this winter which will give the trees more room in which to grow and the whole "island" a face-lift. This thinning will provide fencing material — a much-needed commodity in the nearby ranching country. Mr. Howes contends: "Why not grow fence-posts for the prairies on the prairies?" And to practise what he preaches, he plans to obtain 4,000 trees from the Dept. of Natural Resources Forestry Branch to begin a plantation on his own land, fifty miles southwest of Kindersley, next spring.

The grasslands are generally unsuitable for trees, but scattered throughout them are pockets of light soil, which, according to Mr. Howes, can be suitably managed to provide wood material, cover for beneficial bird and animal life, shelter for surrounding land, means increasing soil moisture, and last, but certainly not least, beauty in the prairie landscape.



just love communing with nature and learning all about our little feathered friends."