

## **Naturalized Park Projects for 2011**

By Gary Pedersen, Naturalized Areas Supervisor, City of Saskatoon

Overall, the songbird habitat projects for our parks took a high priority this year.

The first project involved just under a hundred plants in two gallon containers that were planted in Lakewood and Donna Birkmaier Parks. These plants were donations that we were only too grateful to accept. They were very welcome additions and were put to good use in our shrub bed renovation efforts to provide cover and food sources for birds. Plant species consisted of snowberry, red-osier dogwood, and black currant. An additional half dozen Saskatoon berry shrubs were also strategically planted in Lakewood Park shrub beds to boost their attractiveness for birds.

The second major planting event took place in early summer when the Native Plant Society donated 250 red-osier dogwood and 250 paper birch seedlings to us for use in our parks. Several of the donated dogwood plants went to Dumont Park to enhance wildlife cover in shrub beds. The majority were planted in both Lakewood and Donna Birkmaier Parks with the same objective in mind. The birch seedlings were planted in both Lakewood and Birkmaier Parks in areas that we considered closely resembled their natural habitat in the wild. We are both optimistic and hopeful that we will witness good rates of survivability.

One initiative that we launched was an effort to salvage native plants that would be destroyed in the course of city expansion and development. We were able to access one such site, and about 20 Saskatoon, wolf willow, and snowberry shrubs were potted up into two gallon containers. These plants found "good homes" in shrub beds of Heritage and Birkmaier parks. We hope to continue this initiative next year and will be on the lookout for other candidate sites.

Our fourth planting effort of the year took place in the fall and consisted of transplanting unwanted volunteer plants to other suitable sites in our parks. We had noticed several Buffalo berry and wolf willow plants growing along pathways in Gabriel Dumont Park and which owing to their location would have to be either destroyed or moved. About a dozen young buffalo berry shrubs and a similar number of wolf willow found homes in Heritage and Lakewood Parks. Here again, this is a practice that we wish to use and carry over into the future.

Our last effort of the season took place in late fall with our first attempt to introduce native wild flowers into both shrub beds and grasslands. This was the first of many efforts to establish more biodiversity in our parks. Careful attention was paid to matching species to appropriate site conditions. Sites were also selected in "bare" areas of turf that may expedite seed germination. The process will be slow and on-going but with persistence and patience, we hope to eventually see more native forbs in our grassland areas. Flower seed was dispersed in late October and early November in Lakewood and Donna Birkmaier Parks. Species used in this first attempt consisted of Yarrow, Prairie Coneflower, Blue Flax, Purple Prairie Clover, Black-eyed

Susan, Rhombic-leaved sunflower, Giant Hyssop, and Golden Bean. We will monitor results very closely to see how our direct seeding technique will fare. We are especially curious about the fate of the Golden Bean as this plant can be very finicky with respect to germination success.

We are continuing to develop park management guidelines that will enhance the suitability of our parks for wildlife. As an example, we have witnessed some mortality of a few pine trees in shrub beds in Birkmaier Park which, under advice from the Nature Society, we will replace with a more wildlife friendly species such as spruce.

We will also continue to develop and implement a grassland management strategy that will attempt to accommodate the widest diversity of wildlife species possible. With the continued interest, advice and help of many interested stakeholders in our naturalization efforts, we remain very optimistic for the future.