

“Each generation of humanity takes the earth as trustees ... We ought to bequeath to posterity as many forests and orchards as we have exhausted and consumed.”

J. Sterling Morton

I recently read an article published by the Arbor Day Foundation. The article was entitled, “Saving Our Heritage Trees.” Having read the article, my understanding of heritage trees was enhanced, and it reinforced my thinking as to why we, the current trustees of this Earth, must protect and save such specimens.



By definition, a heritage tree is typically an individual tree, perhaps exceptionally large in stature, with unique value, and often deemed irreplaceable. Other criteria could include age, rarity, aesthetic, environmental, and historical value. A national, nonprofit organization, called American Forests, has long

promoted heritage champion trees. In 1940, it began keeping an official record of the country’s largest trees. Today, nearly nine hundred species and varieties are listed in the National Register of Big Trees. The Nebraska Forest Service sponsors its own Nebraska Champion/Heritage Tree program.

Therefore, a heritage tree may not only be great in size, notable in longevity, or perhaps unusual in form, but also it may be historically significant. Regardless of how or why a tree became a heritage tree, its survival is dependent on public understanding and support.

Saving our heritage trees is important. As we all know, extinction is forever. As a young child, I remember reading about the extinction of dinosaurs and the dodo bird. Few of us realize that within the past 100 years, three tree species have become extinct. They include the *Crudia zeylanica*, also called the Sri Lanka Legume Tree. It was a large tree once prevalent in Sri Lanka, and, as of 1998, it exists no more. Another tree species *Hopea shingkeng*, found mostly in India, was declared extinct in 1998 due to extensive harvesting. In 1994, the last surviving

tree of the species *Nesiotia elliptica*, also called the Saint Helena olive tree, became extinct. Human interference such as deforestation, poor management, and other examples of human exploitation were major factors responsible for the trees' extinction. Most of us never knew of those three tree species. The fact remains, careless human actions contributed to their demise.

Saving heritage trees crosses generations. J. Sterling Morton supported that when he said each generation takes the earth as trustees. It is our responsibility, as temporary residents, to nurture and care for these special trees. Heritage trees eventually succumb to the ravages of nature, or they simply die from old age. However, it saddens me to hear when these unique trees are destroyed by human neglect or other human interventions, especially when their deaths could have been prevented. I firmly believe every individual who reveres the past should do all that he or she can to save these trees for future generations.

If you know of a potential tree to be considered as a Nebraska Champion/Heritage tree, I urge you to contact the Nebraska Forest Service to nominate said tree. Their website is <http://nfs.unl.edu/guidelines>. The photo of the tree in this column is that of a Nebraska champion. It is an Eastern Cottonwood, located near Beatrice, and was nominated and confirmed in 2013. Perhaps you know of a new champion?