



## Some Trees Need to Come Down at ASU

*by Marilyn Loser*

2015 December 2

Since the fall of 1983, Adams State's campus with its beautiful trees has been important in my life. First as a student racing to classes across the campus and then, as a faculty member, still racing to classes, I always noted and appreciated the majestic trees. Sadly, some of the trees are no longer healthy, posing a safety hazard, and need to come down.

Earlier this year, Adam Moore and Sam Scavo, foresters in the Alamosa District of the Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS), inspected about 130 trees on Adam State University's south campus (south of First Street) and provided pruning and removal recommendations to ASU grounds personnel.

Six trees, mostly east of Petteys Hall, are at high risk and must be removed. According to the report written by Moore, visual inspection revealed defects including "large cracks, areas of decay, dead and broken limbs, small live crown ratio, amount of epicormic shoots, and mushrooms on the bark or cavities."

Think of the live crown ratio as the proportion of the height of the tree that is green when in leaf. For example, a healthy tree has a ratio 60% or greater, meaning the bottom 40% of the tree is the trunk and possibly bare branches, while the top 60% has green leaves. If a tree doesn't produce enough leaves, it can't feed itself! If you walk around the south part of campus and look up, you can see tall trees with bare trunks almost to the tops of the trees. And some of these are leaning eerily and could be harmful in the future. A number of trees were removed from Cole Park this summer for these same reasons.

According to Moore's report, epicormic shoots "are not as firmly attached to the tree as a regular branch, which leads them to being more likely for failure. Excessive amounts of epicormic shoots are an indication that the tree may be stressed and in decline. Many of the major limbs of these trees have died, and epicormic sprouts and small branches are the only thing keeping the trees alive. This makes it difficult to prune effectively, thus the recommendation to begin removing and replacing the trees."

I'm happy that Adams is now looking closely at its urban forest. It needs help. And there have been warning signs. I remember one day, around 2000, when a large tree just south of the Business building fell right onto the roof. I was stunned when I saw it as I walked from the old Science (now Art) building. Fortunately, no one was hurt. Looking at the remaining stump, you could see that the tree was largely hollow near the ground.

The City of Alamosa has been replacing old trees in Cole Park over the last several years. This includes planting 24 trees with the help of citizens in 2010 and three donated trees near the library last summer.

Maintaining a healthy urban forest isn't cheap. It would be a good idea if ASU set up a replacement program and earmarked funds for the removal and purchase of trees. Moore estimated it will cost about \$1,000 to remove each of the high-risk trees at Adams. His report recommended crown cleaning (removing dead branches) in 69 trees, at an average cost of \$650 per tree. It would probably be impossible to do all of the maintenance in one year, which is why it's good to have a maintenance plan and spread the cost out over a number of years. Tree maintenance is an ongoing, but important, expense.

The maintenance plan needs to include planting new trees on a routine basis, and replacement trees need to be selected from a more diverse palette than in the past. According to Moore's report, the CSFS recommends that no tree species exceed 10% of the total tree population. This diversity is intended to avoid catastrophes such as the loss of millions of trees due to Dutch elm disease. According to Wikipedia, "Of the estimated 77 million elms in North America in 1930, over 75% had been lost by 1989."

It would be a good idea for anyone planting a tree in Alamosa to consider planting something other than a towering cottonwood. Why? Small and medium trees shade people well, don't require as much water, are easier to maintain from the ground (or near the ground), and are less likely to cause a lot of damage if they fail.

With the help of the Alamosa Tree Board, the City of Alamosa has experimented with a variety of tree species in recent years. It's not easy matching species to our unique climate, but many new trees are doing well. Visit [AlamosaTrees.net](http://AlamosaTrees.net) for recommended species.

*"It would be wonderful if future generations could enjoy a beautiful, healthy ASU urban forest."* Marilyn Loser