

Canyon Courier
Environment Column
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SPRING SNOWS AND HAZARD TREES

Last week's heavy wet snow storm brought ominous creaks from snow laden trees in the area. Last year, during the same kind of spring storm in the Spring Ranch area near the Chief Hosa exit, a 200 ft. ponderosa went down ten feet from a house on retired Denver City Forester Ray Howe's property. The root structure of the tree was very shallow, that was probably the reason why the weight of the snow caused the healthy tree to fall.

I look out of my office window at the Evergreen Office Park onto Meadow Drive. In the driveway below and across the street leading into the PDQ Print Shop are three old growth Blue Spruces trees, tall and leaning, waiting for their creaks to become a loud boom when the weight of the snow or the wind becomes too much for their root structure.

Allen Owen at the Colorado State Forest Service contends that looking at hazard trees on a property is one of the criteria for selecting which trees will be flagged to be cut on property before developers can obtain a building permit. "Each situation is unique, he said," but we do our best to work with the developers and the homeowners and within reason negotiate which trees will be cut according to fire safety regulations."

Last week, I wrote of the concerns of developers and homeowners regarding the fire regulations for new development. Both groups are concerned with the effects of cutting down trees on the privacy a homeowner will have after the home is built.

Owen contends that the required marking of trees to be cut is "not a cook book operation" and patio trees can be left for privacy. It's important to observe the 10 to 20 ft. from the foundation rule for safety. Trees are also marked to insure that there is adequate spacing of approximately 15-20 feet between the crowns of trees to stop fire from jumping from tree to tree.

The spacing between trees to be cut is determined by the character of the lot. The questions which regulate the amount and the spacing between trees to be cut are concerned with whether it is a level lot or is it a steep lot which is more difficult to defend against fire. Also, underbrush and trees are often marked closely along driveways to provide fuel breaks.

Scott Woods, of the State Forest Service, is the mitigation forester who also looks at the health of the trees when marking them. This is determined in part by the cone crop of the year before and any evidence of bug infestation. The height and shape of the trees,

as well as the diversity of species on the property also determine which trees will be cut. In addition, pruning to a height of 8-10 ft. on individual trees is often recommended.

Unfortunately, when all these things are taken into account it means that many trees will have to be cut down. When the soil composition allows, developers can save the trees by moving them to other locations on the property or saving them in a central location until the building is complete and then moving them back around the house, while still observing the regulated zones.

Joan Spalding is a certified arborist and an educational consultant. This column is provided as a service of the Evergreen Rotary Club.