

Learn to care for your pine trees

By Sue Stafford
Correspondent

Sisters Country residents and visitors alike have high regard for the magnificent ponderosa pine trees that can be found around town and in the surrounding forests.

Ponderosas were the mainstay of the early Brooks-Scanlon and Shevlin-Hixon lumber mills. Sisters used to be home to a Brooks-Scanlon company housing area for the families of lumberjacks who logged the surrounding ponderosa forests.

Residents may grumble about the task of cleaning up pine needles and cones in their yards, but would probably never consider cutting down any of these majestic sentinels.

As Sisters grows and more housing and businesses are constructed, the native ponderosas that are “in the way” must be cut down, sometimes leaving remaining ponderosa vulnerable to high winds. Disturbance and compacting of the soil around the trees during construction, and installation of asphalt and concrete surfaces, can lead to eventual weakness in the trees, opening the pines

up to insect infestations and disease, often resulting in dead trees.

Those who are fortunate enough to have ponderosa pine trees on their property would be well-served to educate themselves on the “care and feeding” of these local giants, to ensure they remain healthy, rather than becoming a danger to life and homes.

The ponderosa pine has a very long taproot, which anchors it well into the ground, roots that can spread out 100 feet from the tree, and resistance to fire provided by the thick bark of the tree.

To care for ponderosas growing on private property, don't overwater but provide adequate water to avoid stressing the trees during dry periods. Prune out dead limbs. Watch for any pitch oozing from a wound or crack. Look for bore holes or frass (sawdust) from beetles in the bark.

Approximately 200 insect species can affect ponderosa pines from cone stage to maturity. Pinecone beetles cause tree death by transmitting blue stain fungus to the tree. Their larvae also consume the phloem, restricting

the flow of nutrients to the top of the tree.

Western pine beetle is a common cause of death for older trees, drought-stressed trees, and even healthy, vigorous trees during epidemics.

Bark beetles are naturally present in all stands, and if there is a lot of slash lying around the bark beetle population can explode and kill vigorous trees.

Dwarf mistletoe is the most widespread parasite that causes branch and stem deformation. It germinates on ponderosa pine branches and forces its roots into the phloem, creating stem cankers that leave the wood weak, making it susceptible to fungal infections and insect attacks.

Root diseases, rusts, trunk decays, and needle and twig blights also cause significant damage. Be on the lookout for forked tops that may split or limbs that are only partially attached to the tree.

One of America's most abundant tree species, the ponderosa pine is native to western North America, from central British Columbia south to central Mexico, from the Pacific Northwest and California to



PHOTO BY JIM CORNELIUS

Sisters is a town of towering ponderosas.

South Dakota's Black Hills and Utah's Bryce Canyon, covering approximately 27 million acres of land.

When searching for the Northwest Passage with the Corps of Discovery, Meriwether Lewis collected and described “the long-leaved pine” but the specimens didn't survive the journey. Scottish botanist David Douglas rediscovered the ponderosa 25 years later near Spokane and named it *Pinus Ponderosa*, or ponderosa pine. Ponderosa is the Latin word for “heavy, weighty, or

significant” and refers to the impressive size and stature of the trees.

The environment and weather conditions in Sisters have made this a favorable location for ponderosas, explaining their historical abundance. Ponderosa typically grow in semiarid locations (less than 20 inches of annual precipitation), like our high desert, often surrounded by juniper and sage, at 3,000 to 10,000 feet elevation, with a hardiness zone of

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