
In Praise of the Japanese Black Pine

Pinus Thunbergiana

Steve Murray

Japanese Black Pines started being used extensively along the Jersey Coast after the devastating North east storm of March, 1962, that destroyed homes, beaches, streets, boardwalks and plant life.

This tree, introduced from Asia, was found to be far superior to any of our native trees in its ability to thrive in our harsh seashore environment. It is second to none in that respect.

I have planted them just yards away from the crashing Atlantic and have never seen as much as even a salt burnt needle, even after a hurricane. The protective border of them circling the Lighthouse gardens is what has allowed the great variety of plants to survive these thirty years.

I also think it's an incredibly beautiful tree with its dark green needles, scaly brownish gray bark and the way it can grow into artistically rustic, twisted shapes near the sea.

It is also beneficial to wildlife because it provides the tallest and densest nesting and perching locations for the islands birds. A pair of yellow crown night Herrons roosted on the pines behind the Lighthouse last year.

The reason there is a healthy population of grey squirrels (if you are a squirrel lover) is because of the fact that this mammals main food source is the nuts of the black pine cones.

Unfortunately, there is a war on against the pine in some coastal communities. A few towns just north of us have even called for the complete eradication of them on public lands. Hundreds of these trees have already been chain sawed.

The reason for this is mostly based on the recommendations of several horticulture consulting firms doing business in the State. I don't agree with their thoughts on the pines at all.

Here are their two main reasons:

#1 The pine is an invasive species that will out compete native species creating a mono culture of trees and a detriment to the environment.

#2 It is too prone to infestation by the Southern Pine Beetle and therefore should not be planted any longer and all existing trees should be removed.

Almost everyone I know in the horticulture, landscape and environmental communities know the real reason for this. Some of these communities have been pressured to get rid of the pines because they grow taller than most native trees- enough to obstruct some home owners views. The consulting firms reports make the cutting down of the pines legitimate.

My response is this:

#1 The tree is not invasive. It is not considered an invasive species by either the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection or the Native Plant Society of New Jersey. Nowhere in my forty plus years as a landscape designer/consultant have I encountered even the slightest evidence of invasiveness. No one I have ever met has either.

#2 In regards to the danger of infestation by the Southern Pine Beetle, all pines, including our native pitch pine, are susceptible to it. This is not sufficient reason to avoid planting the Black Pine, and certainly not a reason to arbitrarily remove healthy, established, mature trees as a precaution. Where this has been done is shameful.

The correct way to handle it is to try to keep the pines in a healthy state, monitor them for infestation and disease and prune and treat with pesticides if the trees are infected. Removal of any tree should always be a last resort.

Everyone who has many years experience planting on the barrier islands knows that good selections of hardy plants are few and far between. Almost anything that can grow here should be encouraged and cultivated. Each passing year reveals less and less trees and overall plant life on the barrier islands. This is due to a combination of overdevelopment, some towns not following through with enforcement of landscape plantings as per planning/zoning regulations and last but not least, new property owners being "anti- tree" because they block their view (not to mention bird droppings as well as leaves or needles).

My advice to everyone is to keep planting this outstanding tree.



CITY OF NORTH WILDWOOD

901 Atlantic Avenue
North Wildwood, NJ 08260-5778
(609) 522-2030

Patrick T. Rosenello
Mayor

Kevin Yecco
City Administrator

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Steve Murray
10 Carter Rd.
Cape May Court House, NJ
08210-2542

Dear Mr. Murray:

Thank you very much for providing a copy of your most recently published Hereford Inlet Lighthouse Newsletter (Issue #43, Spring/Summer 2017).

As is often the case with your publication, many stories are historically insightful and very interesting. However, in this most recent edition, I note that you have authored an article entitled: "In Praise of the Japanese Black Pine". Unfortunately, the opinions shared in that article are in direct contradiction to the City's duly adopted (and state-approved) "Public Lands Vegetation Management Plan/Community Forestry Management Plan", as developed by the Lomax Consulting Group.

As indicated in my October 19, 2016 correspondence to your entire executive board, and our joint meeting held December 14, 2016 as a consequence thereof, it appears that the issues discussed at that meeting have been misunderstood. Clearly, it was pointed out that your executive board is "an agent of the City" and, as such, you are bound by duly established policies and procedures of the city. The contents of your above-referenced article, to reiterate, are in conflict to that which we discussed in group fashion. Complete understanding of defined roles, responsibilities and authority in the context of both the Management Agreement between your organization and the city as well as the Lease Agreement between the NJDEP and the City of North Wildwood is paramount for the proper oversight of the Hereford Inlet Lighthouse.

Due to the City being in the midst of the hectic summer swing, it seems that the most prudent time for a follow-up meeting will be after Labor Day and I will certainly reach out to you at that time to discuss potential dates.

Thank you for noting the above.

Very truly yours,

Patrick Rosenello, Mayor