



SAVING THE ASPEN

By Douglas DaBoone Johnson

People in states like Utah and Colorado are concerned about the decline of the aspen population. Aspen are dying in droves, and of most importance, in some hard hit areas, there are no young aspen tree sprouts. My family has been in the business of saving forests for many generations, and my company, Johnson Tree Removal has solutions. We have studied hundreds of documents that address the aspens' plight. We have also been lucky to work with a team of arborists, who have supplied us with information and assisted us in the application of our plan.

During our research, we've found that the quaking aspen (latin name: *populus tremuloides*)

is a terrifically unique plant. A grove of aspen are all connected underground by a unified root system. What that means is, when a forest fire

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consumes a forest, the aspen roots remain intact; they are able to sprout new suckers after the adult trees have all burned. We know they'll

survive a fire, but why are they dying?

A healthy forest has a balance of species and tree age and size, and yet, many aspen groves are missing a generation or two. This lack of young trees puts a stress on the entire root system. In some cases, young aspen are not sprouting because the unique conditions of soil temperature and acidity that the saplings require are amiss; they are often too cold from too much ground detritus. There is also a problem with competition for sun and water with conifers. Aspen need a great deal of sun; in some circumstances, the conifers can be thinned to make room for their growth.

"...the best way to save an aspen grove is to remove the dying and diseased trees from the site."

Another reason for aspen decline involves an increase in the herbivore population; the decrease of wolves in populated areas led to more elk, moose, and deer. These animals ravage the aspen by feeding on the young saplings. Additionally, I would also point out that some aspen forests were grazed by tens of millions of sheep between 1960 and 1975. (While sheep still graze by the thousands, major world mutton production has moved to Australia.) Rodents are known to devour the bark of young aspen as well.

The quaking aspen is a sensitive tree. It is

strained by competition, sapling loss, and imperfect weather conditions. When stressed, it becomes more susceptible to airborne fungus and to a variety of cankers. Due to their unified



Dangerous treetop hanging over new construction

root systems, when a grove of aspen are infected with airborne fungus it's best to cut down the dying trees and remove all diseased bark from the property. Aspen fungus, if left on site, will continue to kill; care must be taken not to cas-



Clean forest floor, removed of diseased bark and other detritus

ing and diseased trees from the site. We recommend taking them to green waste facilities (not

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to the landfill). We have also saved individual trees that have dying limbs or are dying from the top down. By taking the time to remove

the dead aspen from a grove, you make the entire (connected) stand healthier. Once the trees are back in balance, you’ll have a healthy grove for decades to come.

cade the sick aspen among the healthy trees.

Because fungus is a major problem, the best way to save an aspen grove is to remove the dy-

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Property that has been cleaned of the sick and dying trees, limbs, and bark