

Douglas Fir: The Story of the West's Most Remarkable Tree

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Stephen Arno and Carl Fiedler's inviting text *Douglas Fir* is filled with information about the versatile, resilient conifer that "from firewood to flumes, flagpoles to flooring, snowshoes to spars, and liquor to lumber [fills] needs or niches in the lives of everyday people."

Treating the Douglas fir as the "most remarkable" tree in the West, the book highlights its thirteen pairs of chromosomes—more than the twelve pairs that are typical for conifers. Douglas firs, it notes, have unusual genetic diversity, ranging from 600-year-old inland varieties that are "dwarfs occupying lava flows in the American Southwest" to coastal varieties that are "towering 300-foot-tall giants anchored in the deep, well-watered soils of the Pacific Northwest." These genetic variations impact the trees' growth habits as well as their functions in forest ecosystems. In some environments, the trees are threatened; elsewhere, they're invasive.

The book looks forward to recommend changes in forest management practices, hoping to enhance the health and sustainability of Douglas fir forests. Although such areas can never return to their "primeval state[s]," prescribed burns and other ecology-based practices could make a tremendous positive difference: "Although the ecology of the West's Douglas fir forests seems almost infinitely complex, the fundamentals of these ecosystems are understandable."

The book also outlines the instrumental role that the Douglas fir played in the history of the West, including its use "since the earliest of times" by Native American tribes and its prominence over the past 300 years in the shipbuilding, construction, and lumber industries. Featuring multiple illustrations, historical photographs, and a list of notable Douglas firs to visit across the US and Canada, the book is a comprehensive look at the fascinating tree.

Marshalling a wide range of botanical, ecological, historical, and cultural insights together, *Douglas Fir* contains powerful perspectives on an iconic tree.

KRISTEN RABE (September / October 2020)

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