



CELEBRATING BIODIVERSITY

"This is so much fun! I really don't care how dirty I get," squeals a Grade 3 student, while gleefully turning over the soil and pulling out weed roots in the Sun Circle gardens at Dr. E.W. Coffin School. On a glorious blue-skiied October 20, 2010 morning, small groups of Grade 2/3 students, pulled from their classroom to work with volunteers for 15-20 minute sessions, prepared a planter for rough fescue plugs donated by The City of Calgary Parks department. A few days later, Grade 1/2 students took turns during their outdoor recess to plant nearly 80 plugs of our provincial native grass. Later still, other students had opportunities to water in these precious clumps before freeze up. They will be nursed through the winter and then transplanted into the nearby Centennial Natureground grassland reclamation area in the spring.

On the same day, about 150 Grade 7 students from nearby Simon Fraser School walked through the neighbourhood with their picnic lunches, accompanied by teachers and parent volunteers, and crossed Whisper-



ing Grasses Walkway to Nose Hill Park to help City Parks plant 1000s of fescue plugs. This is part of a prairie restoration project, just north of the Brisebois entrance, where the overgrown and invasive caragana patch has been removed. The caragana, or Siberian peashrub, was originally planted as a windbreak for the former homestead in Many Owls Valley. But it takes over and chokes out the native plants, creating an ecological desert in its understorey, where nothing else can grow. The plugs went into a mulched area and an adjacent unmulched area. This is an experiment to test the success of the fescue in a variety of soils, and whether the decomposing mulch captures some of the nitrogen, thus creating a more challenging soil for weeds - which is good for the native species! Another area nearby has been planted with rows of various native grasses, to see which ones do well on those southerly slopes.

Right here in the neighbourhood, you can find out a little more about rough fescue by visiting the sign, A Diverse Gathering, found at 51o 06' 13.73" N, 114o 08' 12.40" W, 1139.4 m in Whispering Woods and/or at www.natureground.org.

Environmentally yours,
Polly Lee Knowlton Cockett



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