

Endangered Whitebark Pine

Saving the Ents

Some trees just deserve respect. We all know them. They lodge themselves in our memories like markers of special times and places. These old giant moss covered characters have been standing watch for many hundreds of years providing shelter, food and protection for so many generations and types of animals and plants that it's difficult to really grasp their impact on our psyche and our world. It's big.

For some of us, those trees are the Whitebark Pine. They grow up at higher elevations and stand out from the crowd. Twisted scarred and often looking half dead these trees have helped shaped a rich high elevation landscape where many other species of trees struggle. Like the goats of the plant world, they are adapted to and hang out on windblown, exposed ridges and rocky outcrops. They live in the inhospitable and arid environments near mountain tops and play a critical role in maintaining a range of wildlife and plant species in a tough place to live. Their seeds are little packets of energy, high in fat and protein and an important food source for Clarks Nutcrackers and similar birds, grizzly, black bear, squirrel populations and the carnivore species that depend on them.

Whitebark Pine are listed as an endangered species in Canada. Blister rust is a non-native fungus that attacks the trees, young and old, and over time is expected to wipe out most of our stands. The response to the threat is slow, underfunded and unorganized in Canada. These beautiful trees are not commercially valuable being too twisted, peculiarly shaped and difficult to reach. Saving them is not an industry priority and money for research is scarce.

Sorcerer Lodge is fortunate to be able to host Whitebark researchers. We've been noticing over the years that some of our trees seem to be fighting back. We've sadly lost several icons (we call them our Ents) that were likely over 800 years old but others apparently have some resistance and are surviving. This is very important. We can harvest cones from these resistant trees and with luck (and some funding) we can spread resistant seedlings in the mountains.

It takes a long view to plant a tree and hope it will be alive in four or five hundred years. The alternative is to know that they may not be here, and that is unacceptable.

Please contact Randy Moody whitebarkrandy@gmail.com if you would like to support Whitebark research, or would like to know more about them.

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