



ALBERTA NATIVE PLANT COUNCIL GUIDELINES ON PLANT RESCUES

Version 1:

March 2009

(this document may be cited as: Alberta Native Plant Council. 2009. Guidelines on Plant Rescues. Published by the Alberta Native Plant Council on line at <http://www.anpc.ab.ca/>)

WHAT ARE PLANT RESCUES

Plant rescues relocate native plants from a site where destruction of the native habitats is imminent. Although this seems like a logical and even a good thing to do, it represents a failure of one of the main goals of ANPC - to conserve Alberta's native plants in the habitats where they naturally occur. Therefore, ANPC neither encourages nor opposes plant rescues. Instead we suggest they be considered case by case.

- The preferred option is to protect the native habitats.
- Plant rescues become an option **only** when a site faces certain destruction.

THE NEGATIVE SIDE OF PLANT RESCUES

They cannot "save" the ecosystem.

Plant rescues are spurred by a desire to save something from a habitat about to be destroyed. A rescue can salvage only a tiny proportion of the plants on a site, and the selection of plants to be rescued is often based in large part on criteria that have little to do with conservation, such as ease of access and horticultural value. The ecosystem that was there, with all its species diversity, genetic variation, and intricate interrelationships, is still irrevocably lost. In addition, the plants chosen for relocation may not thrive, or even survive, in their new habitat.

They can have adverse effects on natural habitats.

Most tangibly, they can spread invasive alien species or in other ways alter the ecosystem of the site where they are replanted. Adding rescued plants may have effects on the new habitat, resulting in unpredictable impacts on species diversity, genetic variation, and the intricate interrelationships of the receiving ecosystem.

They can have adverse effects on conservation.

They can weaken support for habitat conservation by giving the impression that rescuing selected plants compensates for destruction of an entire habitat, or that landscape plantings can substitute for natural habitats. Rescues can divert time, energy, money and leadership that might otherwise be used in activities directly related to protecting natural habitats. They can lead to the perception that saving a few individuals is the same as protecting the ecosystem.

THE POSITIVE SIDE OF PLANT RESCUES

They may strengthen support for conservation.

Rescues can provide opportunities to strengthen support for conservation through education. They have the advantage of teaching about the natural habitats of native plants in terms of a particular place rather than in the abstract, and this vivid reminder of what we are losing can spur support for conservation. Rescues can also make a long-term contribution to public education by providing native plants for public gardens and nature centers.

ETHICAL PLANT RESCUES

Plant rescues should only be conducted as a last resort, when development of the site is imminent and all options that might keep it undeveloped have been decisively closed. A plant rescue should ensure rescued plants are used only in ways that do no harm to their new habitats and that contribute to education and conservation.

- Rescues must not be used as a convenient way for developers to avoid or neutralize opposition.
- A rescue should be limited to areas of the development site where all plants will be destroyed.
- No plants or plant parts should be removed for any purpose from areas that will otherwise be undisturbed.
- A rescue must comply with applicable federal, provincial, and local laws and regulations. Rescuing plants listed as Endangered or Threatened under federal or provincial law is subject to complicated requirements and a permit is required.
- Educational outreach should be an integral part of every rescue.
- A reliable inventory of the plants found on the rescue site is a key factor in determining whether a rescue is appropriate and, if it is, how plants will be used.
- Which non-native species are present on the rescue site, and in what numbers, is important. Even where invasive alien species are not present in large enough numbers to rule out a rescue, their presence may limit the choice of relocation sites.
- Rescues should NOT be considered from sites where there is significant risk that well-established invasive alien plants or other pests will be spread by the relocation of native plants.
- In general a rescue should be pursued only if an appropriate use of the rescued plants is ready at hand or easily found.

Choosing a use for rescued plants

Plants rescued should be used for public benefit, not private gain.

Acceptable uses are:

- replanting at an appropriate site;
- stabilizing disturbed areas;
- providing stock for propagation; and
- providing plant material for a scientific project.

Unacceptable uses are:

- selling rescued plants or giving them away in return for financial benefit.
- providing plants for private gardens through plant rescues conducted solely for that purpose. It may however be appropriate to allow participants to dig additional plants for their own use, as a thank-you. This should be considered only if there are left-over plants that are scheduled for imminent destruction once all the plants needed for the intended use have been collected.

Replanting at another site

This is the most common use of rescued plants. In planning for replanting, maintaining the ecological integrity of the relocation site is always a priority concern.

- An appropriate replanting site is a managed wildflower garden or interpretive nature trail. Plants should be relocated into habitat suitable for them, and to sites where there is good reason to expect sufficient care for the relocated plants to survive and continuing protection of the site from future development.
- Relocating rescued plants into undisturbed native habitats or into a site being maintained as a natural area is discouraged. They may compromise the site's botanical and ecological integrity.
- The risk that invasive alien species may be moved with the rescued plants, and the potential impact, ecological and financial, of such spread needs to be understood. Even at relocation sites that are gardens, the staff should know about invasive plants or other pests present at the rescue site, so that they can monitor the new plants and catch problems promptly.

The choice of a relocation site should take into account its programs and staffing. Preference should be given to recipients that regularly offer programs that help visitors identify and learn about native plants, and that can make it clear that the added plants have been rescued, not wild collected, especially in the case of species that are not available commercially. What help on-site staff can offer in site preparation and in replanting and maintenance of rescued plants is also important.

Propagation

- Rescued plants, and seeds and cuttings taken from other plants in areas scheduled for destruction, may be used to provide stock for propagation programs.
- Plants propagated from this stock may be sold to raise money for programs or for use in restoration projects, as long as propagating native species are not through plant rescues conducted solely for that purpose.

Cooperative scientific projects

Rescued plants may be used for a scientific project compatible with the mission and policies of ANPC.

based in part on Virginia Native Plant Society POSITION ON PLANT RESCUES Plant rescues
<http://www.vnps.org/Rescuespositionpaper.pdf>.