

Watering and More Watering

Newport Forest Tuesday May 5 2010 2:00 - 7:00 pm

weather: prec. 7 mm; RH 36%; BP 100.1 kPa; WSW 10-50 kmh; sn/cld; T 24° C

purpose: to water trees in Regen Zone

participants: Kee, Steve

Over the afternoon, we trucked two loads of water from the "drought-buster" (a 2000 gal tank) down to the Regen Zone. In the first watering, we took care of all the red-flagged trees (knee-high or less) and the second watering took care of the yellow-flagged trees (hip- to knee-height). Each load consisted of close to 100 litres of water distributed into three kinds of jug: (recycled) kitty-litter jugs (6 litres); much larger water-cooler jugs (17 litres), and a picnic jug, also large (19 litres). All watering is done with the 6-litre jugs, the larger ones being used for resupply. Each tree got between a third and a quarter of a jug.

The leafing-out process in the surrounding woods is proceeding normally, with early trees such as the Choke Cherry already fully leafed out for two weeks, while the walnuts have yet to show any green. In the RZ all the larger trees appear healthy, even the ones that were severely nipped by deer over the winter. There is still a supply of moisture below the surface, but the ground has already begun to crack.

With the watering done, we planted the remaining four trees in the strip between the Gallery Forest and the farm track: a Fragrant Sumac, Sweet Gale, and two Hackberrys. These all got red flags.

drought report:

We don't hear much about drought, but the region generally (including much of Middlesex Co.) has been in one since around 1995, when we first noticed the ponds at A'Nowaghi drying up. Here is the rainfall record for the last seven years, up to the end of April:

2004 2005 2006 2007 2008 2009 2010 ? (low precip years)

Ap 68 241 292 243 395 379 55

Tot 617 667 1020 674 1227 926 ??

Our records for 2000 to 2003 are incomplete, owing to snowpack not being recorded, but at least two of those years could fairly be called "drought years."

Regional average precipitation records show a lot of variability from one location to another. For example, Ridgetown has a long-term average of 969 mm, while Chatham has a long-term average of 808 mm. But if we take 900 as our baseline for a "normal" year, what I choose to call drought years are 200 mm or more short of this mark. Given enough such years back to back and the water table will sink down to river height, a good five metres below ground level. Such a retreat, if prolonged, puts all but the largest trees at risk of losing moisture, with dieback beginning at the topmost branches. Smaller trees, including those newly planted, show more disastrous effects and will simply not survive without watering.

As a result of watering, our survival rate is excellent, according to Bill Preiksaitis, and far better than most wild plantings, even with normal rainfall. In any event, we are now phasing out the planting program. The Regen Zone is almost ready to leave on its own (except for a few more years of watering, if necessary).

At a later date, we hope to publish the RZ inventory.

IMAGES:

(click on image to enlarge)

(click on image to enlarge)

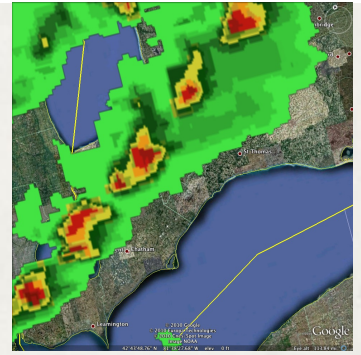
(click on image to enlarge)



This Ohio (?) Buckeye has spun its wheels for a good eight years, growing perhaps 2-3 cm in total. Now, suddenly, it's decided to do some serious growing, shooting up a good 10 cm already. This is not unusual in tree-planting situations, apparently. Donald Craig knows lots of stories like that, probably has something to do with the time it takes to establish a good root system. (more below) The buckeye is not a native species, of course, but one could at least say "nearly so" in that several plantings have survived in SW Ontario. Will this one survive? Hope plays no particular role. Curiosity is king. Note drip-pot, flag and mulch cloth to suppress nearby veg.



*Stealth Cam 05/01/2010 16:18:24 ● 79F
Wild Turkey tom stops by to say "hello," cleverly posing to make it appear that the metre-stick is balanced on his head.*



Google Earth image of approaching storm system last wednesday afternoon. One of the storm cells appears headed for Newport Forest, which is right there in the NW corner of Elgin Co. But lo! The cell went due east, just grazing the property, whereas earlier it had appeared to be tracking right for us. Hmmmm . . .