

## THE WHITE PINE – MICHIGAN'S STATE TREE

Michigan's state tree, the Eastern white pine is a graceful and beautiful tree. The bark is smooth and dark green when the tree is young and as it matures, the bark becomes thick, gray and blocky. The branches grow horizontally, which make it an excellent climbing tree. The needles grow in clusters of five and are a pale blue-green. The needles are soft and pliable; they do not snap when bent.

Although the white pine is mostly found in the Upper Peninsula and northern half of the Lower Peninsula, it is often planted and grows very well statewide as an ornamental or yard tree. The white pine grows well on a variety of sites. It prefers well-drained sandy loams but can grow in poorly drained soils, rocky outcroppings, flood plains and ridges.

The white pine is not commonly planted commercially because of its susceptibility to white pine blister rust and white pine weevil. White pine blister rust is a fungus that must have gooseberry or current bushes present to complete its life cycle. White pine is valued, however, for its light, soft, easily worked wood and is often made into doors, cabinets and construction timber. It is one of the most useful of all American woods.

From the late 1800's to the early 1900's, there was a huge demand for cheap, strong building material because the Midwest was growing so fast. The lumbermen in Michigan rushed to provide material for this growth of cities and towns. The white pine became the most sought-after tree in Michigan by 1860. Michigan led the nation in timber production by 1882. During this peak, the dollar value of timber cut in Michigan exceeded California's gold rush by more than one billion dollars, and most of that timber was white pine. The result was the financial, industrial and commercial rise of Michigan and the large-scale harvest of white pine forests. But the costs of this rapid tree cutting were forest fires, river and stream degradation, soil erosion, and wildlife habitat loss. However, changes in timber harvesting practices, wildfire control, and tree planting efforts like the Civilian Conservation Corps, continue to renew our forests. Today, Michigan's forests are healthy and growing, providing wildlife habitat, recreation, wood products, stream production, and other benefits.

The large beautiful stands of white pine in Michigan were the greatest the world has ever seen. It has been said that Michigan's forests were so thick, that a squirrel could travel from one side of the state to the other without touching the ground! It was in recognition of this tree's beauty, importance and economic contribution to the state that the white pine was designated as the official state tree of Michigan.

Source: Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Hartwick State Park

