

Huge parts of Canada have few trees, or very small trees, or no trees at all. And that's exactly how it's supposed to be.


PRAIRIE AND TUNDRA




TUNDRA comes from a northern European word for flat Arctic areas where lower levels of soil stay frozen.

Millions of years ago, there were birch and spruce trees as far north as Ellesmere Island in Nunavut. As the climate cooled and the ground froze, trees could no longer grow in the Arctic. There are shrubby versions of willows and junipers that might grow a metre or two tall. Some scientists say we should think of these tough Arctic plants as dwarf forests. As climate change warms the tundra and upends the ecosystem, it allows regular trees to move farther north.

The **TREELINE** marks the northern limit of where trees can grow. About 40 per cent of Canada lies north of the treeline.



PRAIRIE comes from the French word for meadow. About 12 per cent of Canada is prairie.



People who are used to living near forests often think of the prairies as a place where the trees are missing. That's not true. First of all, the area stretching from southeastern Manitoba to the foothills of the Rocky Mountains is its own special ecosystem: grasslands. It's sometimes called bald prairie — that is, a vast open place that's never had trees because the conditions aren't right for them. (The soil and climate is perfect for growing all kinds of grasses and other smaller plants.) And second, there *are* trees on the prairies. Lots of them! Poplars, cottonwoods and other trees grow naturally in small valleys and dips in the landscape where there's more water. They offer shelter to animals, too. Many settlers planted windbreaks — trees around their farmhouses and barns that blocked the fierce prairie winds. They also planted shelter belts, which are rows of trees and shrubs that keep the soil from blowing away.