



NEWS RELEASE

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Thousand Cankers Disease threatens black walnut trees in eastern US

NEWTOWN SQUARE, Pa.— The US Forest Service is warning that black walnut trees in the Midwest and eastern US are at risk of infection and death from a disease that was previously known to be active only in western states. Thousand canker disease is caused by a tiny bark beetle that carries a fungus, and the disease was found on walnut trees in Knoxville, Tennessee in July 2010.

“The infestation was discovered by a local forester who was informed about the insect and fungus complex through various sources, including the Forest Service pest alert,” said Manfred Mielke, a pathologist with the Northeastern Area office of the Forest Service. “Surveys of street trees in Knoxville, greater Knox County and surrounding counties have identified hundreds of infested trees,” he said. The disease in the trees found in Tennessee is estimated to have been there for 15-20 years.

So far, added Mielke, no diseased trees have been found outside of urban settings, but a high priority is being placed on survey and early detection of the insect in native ecosystems of the East. “There is great concern among walnut growers, lumber, veneer, and nut producers, and specialty woodworkers,” said Mielke. “Black walnut is consistently among the most valuable of trees in the country.”

The insect and fungus can take 8-10 years to kill a tree. “How vigorous trees in native ecosystems will respond to this insect and fungus complex is unknown,” said Mielke. Many States have already implemented quarantines against the importation of walnut wood from States, including TN, where the disease is present, and more are considering such a rule. The Forest Service is responding by publicizing the latest scientific information and encouraging States to implement survey and detection of the disease in their urban and native forests.

Members of the Walnut Council, Northern Nut Growers and land owners are being asked to survey for the insect as well, said Mielke. Early detection will enable the reduction of artificial spread of the insect and assist in evaluating the potential impact of the disease in native eastern black walnut forests.

The potential damage of this disease to eastern forests could be great because of the widespread distribution of eastern black walnut, the susceptibility of this tree species to the disease, and the capacity of the fungus and beetle to invade new areas and survive under a wide range of climatic conditions.

On the Net: <http://www.na.fs.fed.us/pubs/detail.cfm?id=5225>

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