



NEWS RELEASE

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Insect threatens ash trees in the Northeast

DURHAM, N.H.—While the hardwood-munching Asian longhorned beetle continues to worry many New Englanders, another destructive pest is already knocking on our region's door.

The next major invasive insect within striking distance of our woods only attacks ash trees. Unlike the ALB, which has already prompted a massive response in the Worcester, Mass., area, the emerald ash borer is a much more efficient tree killer. It kills nearly 100 percent of ash trees it infests within 1-3 years.

The emerald ash borer (*Agrilus planipennis*) is a native insect of Asia. It has been considered a highly destructive pest here in North America since it was first detected in the Detroit area in 2002.

The approach of emerald ash borer (EAB) will impact on a landscape scale not just forest health, but also wood product industries that depend on steady ash supplies. Ash is a popular wood resource used in everything from baseball bats and furniture to basket making.

The borer's population has spread outward in several directions across the continent, mainly because of human assisted movement of firewood, woody debris and nursery stock. Already EAB has infested and/or killed very conservatively tens of millions of ash trees across 13 states in the Midwest and mid-Atlantic, as well as southern Canada. The most recent state detections have been in Kentucky, Minnesota and, most recently, in southwestern New York. Experts say EAB's harm to ash trees cannot be overstated.

"This insect has the potential to wipe out ash trees in North America," said U.S. Forest Service Entomologist Kevin Dodds, who is stationed in Durham, N.H.

EAB might possibly do to the ash what the chestnut blight fungus and Dutch elm disease did to the American chestnut and American elm trees.

"It will kill them all," said Jerry Carlson, who is the New York Department of Environmental Protection Chief of Forest Health.

Federal, state and local governments have spent more than \$150 million since 2002 trying first to eradicate EAB, then to slow its spread. Much of this money went toward EAB detection efforts and a much smaller amount to assist affected communities in replanting trees.

EAB's expansion is aided greatly by people hauling firewood and other wood products long distance. The beetle's population spreads only a few miles each year on its own.

"The movement of firewood is potentially moving invasive pests larger distances," said Julia Dunlop, a Canadian Food Inspection Agency forest specialist. "What you're doing is moving a pest faster than it would normally spread naturally."

Moving firewood is a risk pathway that both the United States and Canada are addressing. "Don't Move Firewood" public awareness initiatives in both countries have been ongoing to try to slow the spread of EAB and other harmful forest pests.

When the EAB does arrive in New England – if it has not already -- the forest landscape will begin to change. Within a few years, ash trees in infested areas will start to decline and slowly die.

So far, forest health officials are able to detect new EAB infestations to varying degrees. Purple prism traps, monitoring predatory wasp behavior, destructive sampling and establishing trap trees are some of the methods used to find new infestations.

Once EAB infestations are found they are typically already too big to wipe out. The experience with eradication projects in the Midwest and mid-Atlantic states has not been promising. This does not bode well for eradicating EAB if and when it is found in New England.

As the ash trees in the Northeast begin to decline, there will be an adverse effect on the industries that depend on ash as a resource.

Theresa Secord is the executive director of the Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance. She said Native Americans in those parts have been making ash baskets and other products out of the wood for thousands of years. The ash tree is even central to their creation story, she said.

The loss of the ash will be more than a material loss for her people, added Secord. "We're getting to a point of possible acceptance, of accepting what is. Some people are exploring other materials and making different styles of baskets. But how do you replace a creation story?"

There remains hope that some new technology or biological control might eventually emerge that will check the EAB population, without causing harmful consequences of its own. Scientists and forest health specialists continue to explore and evaluate new tools, technologies and potential biological control agents that will help address EAB and its adverse effects.

If there is a silver lining for New Englanders it is that ash trees make up a smaller percentage of our diverse forests here than in the Midwest. The change in forest landscape throughout much of the Northeast will not be as dramatic as it has been elsewhere.

Trees in the ash family make up only about 1-2 percent of the overall population in New England. The Maine Forest Service says there are about 409 million ash trees in the Pine Tree State. In New York the 900 million to one billion ash trees make up a

more noticeable 5-10 percent of the state's tree population. In contrast, there are Midwestern communities where nearly half the street trees are ash.

Carlson said the public can help protect forests by reporting suspected infestations to authorities. "Collect insects, take digital pictures," he said. "We don't have enough personnel. We need to rely more on 'Joe Citizen' to be our eyes in the field."

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On the Net: www.emeraldashborer.info