**EMERALD ASH BORER HAS ARRIVED**

This past summer the city of Athens unfortunately discovered this invasive insect in the urban environment. It was inevitable that this invasive and highly destructive critter would also start showing up in our surrounding forests and landscape. Recent evaluations and reconnaissance walk-abouts indicated Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) infestations on certain woodlands of Ames, Bern, Lodi and Athens Townships. One might go so far as to say that the State of Ohio is generally infested and that the ash trees of Athens County have recently been found by the EAB. On a positive note it took a while for the EAB to get here compared to other counties in Ohio but it is definitely here now.

The infestation is becoming noticeable in some woodlots and seems to be particularly found upon ash trees at higher elevations a t this time. This spells bad news for our ash trees as the insect is a very destructive invasive pest that almost always results in tree mortality. One good way to find an infestation is to look for bird activity along an ash tree’s trunk. If vigorous bird activity, pecking wounds, bark shards and general feasting seems to be taking place; underneath the bark at these locations galleries and larvae of the EAB were found every time this symptom presented. General tree decline and mortality will also be noticed as well as odd sprouting clusters of branchlets along the trunks.

OK……… now that the EAB has arrived what can we expect and how can this calamity be managed. First don’t panic. Generally ash trees make up no more than 10% of the species mix in a typical southeastern Ohio forest. Mortality at this level of stocking will create canopy gaps and will even thin forests that have good stocking levels. This cycle of mortality is something a healthy and resilient forest might withstand and still maintain its integrity as a viable forest condition. The tragedy is that an entire species is being wiped out in the forest ecosystem. Canopy gaps may be created from the mortality. These gaps might fill in with other very desirable species of trees that will respond to the new forest condition of more light and growing space. A real danger with canopy gaps is that invasive plant species such as ailanthus, bush honeysuckle, autumn olive or multi-flora rose may also respond to the openings. Ash trees are usually found on lower slopes and on east and north facing hillsides. Good growing sites might contain as much as 30 percent or even more of ash trees. In these areas mortality will be severe but manageable. Perhaps one can take a pro- active or even pre-emptive approach and conduct a salvage harvest of the vulnerable ash trees (get some forestry expertise to advice on harvesting). Ash makes fabulous firewood thus if safe for you and with good access one might harvest ash trees for the firewood pile. When large hardwood trees die they often fall apart in chunks and pieces (not always sometimes they can just fall over). Look at the home site, driveway, carport, backyard swing sets, areas where people congregate, power lines and utilities to see how vulnerable they would be to dead ash trees in the vicinity. Be safe with any work around these dead and dying ash trees make sure and use common sense and do not try to tackle something beyond your experience, equipment and comfort level. Learn to identify the ash species and perhaps with that knowledge some pre work and salvage can be done to discriminate against the ash and favor other desirable trees. Help is available the ODNR Division of Forestry has foresters that can offer a woodland and urban evaluation. Other sources of help can be found at the USDA-NRCS the County SWCD and Extension office. The private sector also has consulting foresters, arborists, landscaping specialists, horticulturists and resource expertise. Athens County is very rich in talent when it comes to being able to find resources that are knowledgeable about forest ecosystems. Get your questions answered and recognize that the reality of the EAB will ultimately result in the loss of almost all of our ash trees throughout the county.

A glimmer of hope for the species may emerge. A very small really tiny amount of ash trees (less than 1%) have shown what appears to be host resistance in some of the areas where EAB has been present for quite some time. These lingering ash are currently being studied to determine if they are exhibiting characteristics of resistance or host immunity. So far the vast majority of ash trees are unfortunately very susceptible and will be lost. If one finds a tree that might be host resistant or a lingering ash that has survived the EAB onslaught take note there are scientists and researchers that would be very interested and it could be the link that saves an entire species of trees.

Oh and one last observation, EAB is not affected by cold weather and seems to survive quite well even in temperatures well below zero. It’s a tough and discouraging customer to deal with.

Bill Serbonich CF

Conservation Implementation Specialist