Death stalks the forests and fairways of U.S.

By Mark Leslie

You look out in the forests, and it's devastating. Winged Foot Golf Club superintendent Bob Alonzi lamented after he lost his famous American elm tree to disease this winter. America's golf courses — indeed, its forests — are under attack by diseases for which scientists nationwide are trying to discover cures and treatments.

The "ash yellows" disease is killing white and green ash from Nova Scotia, Canada, to the Missouri River Valley. The dogwood anthracnose fungus has destroyed an estimated half of all the dogwoods in Pennsylvania and affected 9.5 million acres, primarily in the Appalachian Mountains from Virginia southward. And Dutch elm disease has made the United States a graveyard of American elm trees.

These are the stories of the dogwood and ash trees, and the battle being waged in laboratories and in forests to save them.

Fungus rovages nation's dogwood

"The carnage is unbelievable," Virginia Tech's Dr. R. Jay Stipes said of dogwood anthracnose fungus, which has ravaged populations of the native American flowering dogwood, Cornus florida. Stipes called the fungus vicious and voracious, adding that when it strikes, it causes lesions and large brown spots with purple borders on the leaves. It then spreads to branches and trunks, causing cankers and eventually killing the tree.

It is more prevalent at high elevations — areas where high disease pressure and conducive conditions are the highest. Dogwood trees are dying by the millions in the Great Smoky Mountains of Tennessee and North Carolina, said Stipes, a plant pathologist at the Blacksburg, Va., campus.

"It's our third Trojan horse," he added, eluding to the fact that, like Dutch elm disease and chestnut blight, dogwood anthracnose came to America on imported trees — in this case, the Oriental dogwood, Cornus kousa.

"The dogwoods are about half dead in Pennsylvania," said Stipes.

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Tour of Duty

MARK ESODA
Atlanta Country Club
Marietta, Ga.
PGA's BellSouth Classic
May 6-9, CBS

Esoda, 34, is in his fourth year at Atlanta CC. Previously the University of Georgia alum spent time at several Peach State layouts, including Dawson County Country Club, Hidden Hills CC in Stone Mountain and Ansley Golf Club in Atlanta. Ansley is a nine-hole city course that underwent extensive renovation during Esoda's tenure.

Things to look for: No major renovations on the course proper have taken place in the past year. Esoda's crew has concentrated on the periphery — mulching and landscaping back in the tree line. "Everyone should notice a wet year we've had," Esoda said. Last year saw precipitation levels 17 inches above normal. Standing water has resulted in shorter root growth.

DOUG FISHER
TPC at Las Colinas
Irving, Texas
GTE Byron Nelson Classic
May 13-16, ABC

Fisher, 30, started his college career as a forestry major. But a freshman internship at Castle Pine Golf Club in Castle Rock, Colo., under the tutelage of then-superintendent Phil Wycoff, convinced Fisher his future was in turf rather than trees. Since graduating with a four-year degree in landscape horticulture from Colorado State University, Fisher has worked as assistant superintendent at Castle Pines, Green Hills CC in Millbrne, Calif., and The Pinery CC in Parker, Colo. He came to Las Colinas two years ago as construction coordinator and is now in charge of the TPC course.

Things to look for: Water features are the main additions, Fisher said. A drainage ditch has been transformed into a waterfall.

TIM LONG
Barton Creek Country Club
Austin, Texas
Srs. Liberty Mutual Legends of Golf
May 5-8, ABC

Long, 34, oversees all 54 holes at Barton Creek. The tournament will be played over the Tom Fazio layout with the Bill Ccoe/Ben Crenshaw course available next door at the Arnold Palmer layout. Things to look for: The 2nd, 8th and 13th greens have been nearly doubled in size to approximately 7,000 square feet apiece. Several tees have also been enlarged. Water is the focus on the Fazio