

# The Next Dutch Elm Disease?

*Beetles Ravage Michigan Ash Trees; Wisconsin Officials Fear Invasion*

By DAN EGAN  
*Journal Sentinel*

A Michigan doughnut shop will become ground zero this week in that state's desperate campaign to halt a rapid invasion of an ash-tree killing beetle that already has claimed millions of trees in the Detroit area and is threatening to spread to other states.

The Michigan Department of Agriculture has 155 full-time employees in a fight that, if lost, federal officials say could cause as much as \$60 billion in damage to U.S. forests and neighborhoods that turned to ash trees to patch the damage wreaked by Dutch elm disease in the 1960s and '70s.

The emerald ash borer has not been found in Wisconsin, but a monitoring campaign will be conducted this summer in state forests and parks.

The beetle was first discovered in the

United States when Michigan officials found it just two years ago. It is believed to have hitched a ride from Asia in wood packing material or in wood used to stabilize loads in cargo ships.

There are about 700 million ash trees in Michigan and more than 600 million in Wisconsin, not counting those trees planted in urban areas. Ash are among Wisconsin's most popular street trees because of their durability, said John Kyhl, plant pest and disease specialist with the Wisconsin DNR.

"It's hard to impress upon people the impact of this insect," said JoAnn Cruse, Wisconsin director for plant protection and quarantine for the federal Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. "It was even hard for us to comprehend until we saw it over there, when we saw how

many trees had died."

The first target in the push to eradicate the bug - and its potential host trees - is a half-mile radius around a doughnut and coffee shop in Saginaw County in north-east Michigan. Some trees from an infested nursery in the Detroit area were planted at the site in July 2002.

Every ash tree inside that circle around the doughnut shop will be chopped down. Crews expect to take down about 20,000 trees at a cost of about \$500,000. The job will take a few weeks, and then crews will move on to about a dozen other sites in the state as part of a federally funded control effort that could cost \$43 million this year alone.

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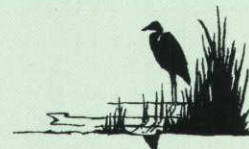
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## Ash Trees —

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"Nobody in Michigan could identify what this insect was. The Smithsonian couldn't even identify it. Then it was sent to other scientists across the globe, and it was actually a Slovakian entomologist who was able to identify it as a beetle. Because the bug is kept in check in its native lands through tree resistance and natural predators, very little research has been done on it. Linsmeier-Wurfel said Michigan researchers could find less than two pages on it in Chinese literature.

Linsmeier-Wurfel said there are no firm plans yet on how and where to build the firebreak around the 2,500-square-mile core infested region near Detroit, though one federal official privately said it likely would have to be at least 3 miles wide.

State law allows Michigan to order the destruction of infested trees, and Linsmeier-Wurfel said most in Michigan

***It's analogous to mad cow disease. If you find an infected cow, you destroy the whole herd.***

— Therese Poland,  
Research Entomologist, U.S. Forest Service

are resigned to the sacrifice they must make to keep the pest from spreading.

"Nobody likes to see the trees go, but for the most part there is support because there is an understanding that if something isn't done now, it will just get that much worse," she said.

Researchers are working on insecticides to combat the bug, and early data shows that some are effective at wiping out about 85% of a population. That isn't good enough to eradicate the beetle. But it may offer hope for some homeowners in

the core infested area around Detroit, where officials believe the tally of dead trees could soon reach 12 million.

It is already an ugly scene.

"It's like the old Dutch elm disease days, with rows and rows of dead ash in the urban areas," said Cummings-Carlson of the Wisconsin DNR.

### Identification, Appearance and Symptoms

The emerald ash borer belongs to a group of insects known as metallic wood-boring beetles. Adults are dark metallic green in color, one-half inch in length and one-sixteenth inch wide and are present only from mid-May until late July. Larvae are creamy white in color and are found under the bark.

The borer's host range is limited to species of ash trees (identified by their distinctive leaves, which are located directly across from each other on the leaf stem and bark). In Michigan, most ash trees are white, black or green. Emerald ash borer does not attack mountain ash, which is not related to white, black or green ash trees.

Usually the borers' presence goes undetected until the trees show symptoms of infestation — typically the upper third of a tree will die back first, followed by the rest the next year. This is often followed by a large number of shoots or sprouts arising below the dead portions of the trunk.

The adult beetles typically make a D-shaped exit hole when they emerge. Tissue produced by the tree in response to larval feeding may also cause vertical splits to occur in the bark. Distinct S-shaped tunnels may also be apparent under the bark.

(Editor's Note: For more information, see [www.emeraldashborer.info](http://www.emeraldashborer.info). This article was reprinted with permission from the Feb. 22, 2004 editions of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel.)

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***"We have come up with three truck loads of stuff, from old engine blocks to transmissions (well-drained) to old fencing to steel 55 gal. drums to used bed knives and reels. At \$.15/lb. we get about \$100 for each load."***

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