



EarthWatch Rhode Island



Topic: Firewood and Exotic Pests

Date: Friday, May 9, 2008

Location: George Washington Memorial Camping Area, Glocester

With high gas prices, many Southern New England families may be vacationing closer to home this summer and camping may be part of their plans. But the wood they use in the campfire may threaten the health of our local forests.

Firewood can harbor many different kinds of invasive pests and diseases that can kill large numbers of trees once transported into new areas. To protect our parks and forests, DEM is asking people who camp in Rhode Island to leave their firewood at home to avoid giving these tree-eating, destructive insects a free ride into the state.

Native insects and diseases are a normal part of healthy forests, but the introduction of foreign insects and diseases can have devastating effects on forests. During the past 100 years, the forests of Rhode Island have been impacted by non-native insects and diseases such as gypsy moth, chestnut blight, Dutch elm disease, and more recently, hemlock woolly adelgid. The non-native pest most recognizable to Rhode Islanders is most likely the Gypsy moth, which defoliated more than 8,000 acres of the state's forest in 2001. Currently, emerald ash borer and asian longhorned beetle represent significant threats. Either of these insects could damage the predominantly deciduous forests of Rhode Island and southern New England.

Invasive species are one the U. S. Forest Service's top four threats to our forest and are responsible for about \$138 billion in economic damages and control costs. Emerald ash borers (the "Beetle with Bling"), Asian longhorned beetles, and Sirex woodwasps are just a few examples of pests of concern that hitch hike on firewood and could pose a serious threat. Although the insects are not believed to be in Rhode Island at this time, they have the potential to cost millions of dollars in damages for clean-up, eradication, and replanting efforts.

The Emerald ash borer (EAB) provides an example of the devastation Rhode Island could face. The EAB is an exotic beetle that was discovered in southeastern Michigan near Detroit in the summer of 2002. The adult beetles nibble on ash foliage but cause little damage. The larvae (the immature stage) feed on the inner bark of ash trees, disrupting the tree's ability to transport water and nutrients. Emerald ash borer probably arrived in the United States on solid wood packing material carried in cargo ships or airplanes originating in its native Asia. Since its arrival, the EAB has killed more than 30 million ash trees in southeastern Michigan alone and cost municipalities, property owners, nursery operators and forest products industries tens of millions



Emerald Ash Borer

of dollars. Since 2002, infestations have been found throughout Ohio, northern Indiana, the Chicago area, Maryland, and recently in Pennsylvania.

People can help stop the spread of these invasive insects by:

- Leaving firewood at home - and not transporting it to campgrounds or parks;
- Using firewood from local sources; and
- If firewood has been transported, burning all of it before leaving any campsite.

About George Washington Camping Area:

Located within the 4000 acre George Washington Management Area, and on the shores of Bowdish Reservoir, the 100 acre George Washington Memorial Camping Area is an overnight, primitive camping facility offering a multitude of opportunities to enjoy the outdoors. There are 45 treed, well spaced gravel sites suitable for tents, trailers, and RV's. Electrical hookups are not available; water is available from the various shared spigots throughout the campground. Bathrooms are either outhouses or pit toilets, there are no shower facilities. There are two Adirondack style Shelters available by reservation, for group camping (limited to 20 persons each). Camping at George Washington is wallet friendly. The cost is \$14/day for residents and \$20/day for non-residents. Reservations can be made through www.reserveamerica.com.

Interview: Cathy Sparks, Chief, DEM Division of Forestry – will provide an overview of the issue and demonstrate examples of damage caused by exotic pests.