

# Forestry officials on urgent mission: Beetles

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Writer

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A dead Asian longhorned beetle is seen in its adult stage, front, and as a larva at the state Department of Resources and Economic Development Division of Forest and Lands office in Hillsboro, N.H., Thursday, May 21, 2009. The beetle has destroyed thousands of trees in Worcester, Mass. (AP Photo/Jim Cole)

(AP) -- Forestry officials in the Northeast are on an urgent mission, tracking thousands of Massachusetts residents as they search for tree-eating stowaway insects they may have carried to campgrounds or vacation homes.

The culprit is the Asian longhorned beetle that has devastated trees in Worcester, Mass., and surrounding communities. The fear is that some have hitched rides into other states in firewood carried by campers or

owners of seasonal homes.

"As far as New England is concerned, you should consider the Asian longhorned beetle Public Enemy Number 1," said Suzanne Bond, spokeswoman for the U.S. Agriculture Department's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

The Asian longhorned beetle is particularly troublesome because, unlike most insects that feed on one or two types of trees, it eats virtually all hardwoods. In New England, that puts a major part of the economy at risk: from lumber, to the cherished and very lucrative fall foliage that attracts visitors from around the world, to the maple trees that produce maple syrup.

So severe is the threat, that forestry officials in all six New England states, New York, Pennsylvania and New Jersey, as well as USDA, are studying camper registrations to find out where Worcester-area residents have been. Then, assuming that many brought their own potentially infested firewood, observers will head into the woods this summer to look for signs of the beetle.

Wary states also are checking property records to learn where Worcester-area residents own second homes or hunting camps.

"We will be sending a questionnaire soon, asking if they brought firewood or landscape material to that recreation home in the past 10 years," said New Hampshire Forest Health Manager Kyle Lombard. So far, they have found 300 properties in just 40 New Hampshire towns.

"I imagine the total number for all of New England is in the thousands," he said.

He said the risk from second homes is even greater than from campers,

who tend to burn their wood in a few days.

"Think about all of the firewood that comes to a second home and just sits at the side of the house for three months," he said. "Everything that's in that firewood emerges and flies into the woods."

Threats from insects have prompted more than a dozen states to ban out-of-state firewood or even moving it long distances within the same state. New Hampshire will join them next month when it bans out-of-state firewood at federal and state-owned campgrounds, except prepackaged, kiln-dried wood marked with its place of origin.

Surveys have shown at least 25 percent of campers in New Hampshire bring firewood with their camping gear - from as far away as California.

"Firewood is usually firewood for a reason," Lombard said. "It's usually the junky, nasty, dead trees in someone's yard that they cut down and don't know what to do with. They are junky, dead trees for a reason, usually because they are infested with something."

Using the 25 percent figure, Vermont estimates that 450 Worcester-area campers brought firewood to state campgrounds between 2002-2008, during the infestation, but before it was discovered.

There have been three other infestations in the United States - New York City in 1996; Chicago in 1998; and New Jersey in 2004 - but the Worcester infestation is by far the largest ever found outside the bug's native China. Crews have cut down more than 20,000 infested trees in and around Worcester since the beetle was detected last August.

"We haven't seen a threat like this to our forests probably since the chestnut blight in the early 1900s" that virtually wiped out American chestnut trees, said Lombard.

Officials believe the infestation in Worcester grew undetected for a decade, leaving a huge opportunity for the beetle to travel far beyond its normal range of a city block to a half mile.

"That's a lot of wood taken to vacation homes," said Bond. "That's a lot of wood taken on camping trips. That's a lot of wood moved to grandma's house, so the po

tential that this insect has spread from the Worcester area is significant."

In fact, Mike Bohne, the U.S. Forest Service's Forest Health group leader in New England, said they assume the beetle has escaped Worcester.

"Now, it's a question of how far has it gone and where is it?" he said.

Other states have faced similar problems with other pests.

In Minnesota, state surveys have shown about half of the vehicles that visit parks overnight carry firewood. In 2005, that meant about 50,000 loads of wood potentially infected with the emerald ash borer, which has infested 10 states and two Canadian provinces.

Because of that infestation, Maryland previously sent letters to hundreds of Ohio and Michigan residents who own land in forested western Maryland, urging them to leave their wood at home.

A coalition of government and private groups is working to spread the word about leaving firewood at home.

Leigh Greenwood of the Nature Conservancy said moving firewood causes problems all over the country, threatening everything from oak trees in northern California to avocado crops in Florida.

Through Web sites and social networking, the groups hope to spread the word nationwide, especially because their research shows the people most familiar with the Internet also tend to be those who need to hear the message: 18-to-29-year-olds.

"They are the kind of person who packs up the pickup, tosses some firewood in to save a little bit of money then drives 400 miles," Greenwood said.

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On the Net:

<http://dontmovefirewood.org>

<http://www.continentalforestdialogue.org>

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