

Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest and DNR partner to respond to threat of emerald ash borer

In partnership with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest is exploring a new strategy to prepare for changes in ash-dominated forests caused by emerald ash borer. Crews recently planted 55,000 seedlings of several other tree species across 117 acres of forest lowlands to the southwest of the Chippewa Waters Flowage in Taylor County in preparation for the eventual demise of area ash trees.

"We're trying to be proactive in our fight against the emerald ash borer," said Brian Bergman, silviculturist for the forest's Medford-Park Falls Ranger District. "It's a long-range strategy that can help preserve the forest for future generations."

Unlike Asian ash species, which have co-evolved with the emerald ash borer in its native habitat, all North American ash species appear to be susceptible to the beetle's destruction.

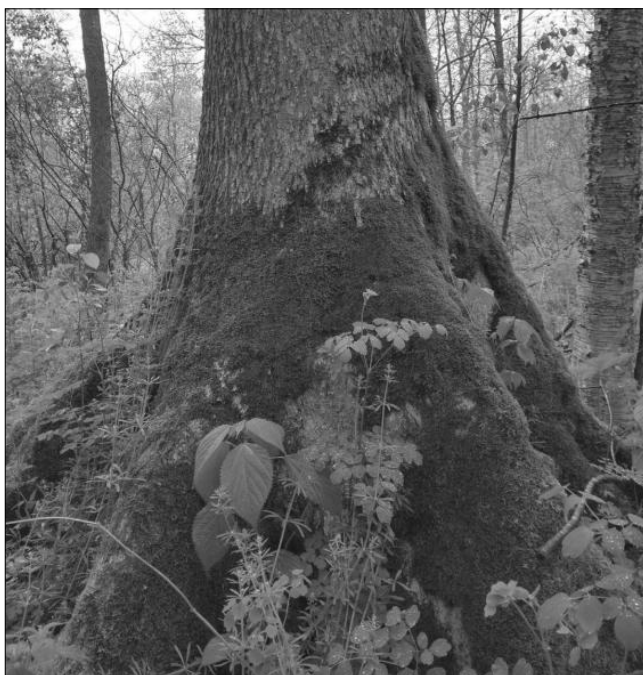
The emerald ash borer has not been detected yet on the national forest, but with 41,000 acres of lowland hardwoods where black ash is the dominant species, specialists are taking precautions. Treatment on the forest to date has focused on actions that would be expected to slow the spread of beetle populations once they're present until viable biological control methods are available.

The project this spring is a trial to see if planting seedlings of alternate tree species is another effective method for responding to the emerald ash borer. Research has shown promising results, and local specialists are hopeful that planting a mix of swamp white oak, silver maple, yellow birch and white cedar seedlings will result in a robust diversity of trees to take the place of the ash trees that are likely to succumb to emerald ash borer infestation.

"This is particularly important in these lowlands where ash trees help to naturally balance the water table and maintain wildlife habitat," said Colleen Matula, DNR



Crews recently planted 55,000 seedlings across 117 acres of the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest to one day take the place of black ash trees vulnerable to the emerald ash borer. USDA Forest Service photo by Brian Bergman.



A buttressed black ash tree on the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest. USDA Forest Service photo by Brian Bergman.



White cedar seedlings like this one, along with 55,000 others planted this spring from a mix of lowland species, may help keep lowland forests intact. USDA Forest Service photo by Brian Bergman.

forest ecologist/silviculturist.

In most areas, water levels are high through early spring. As trees leaf out, they draw water from

the ground. Mature black ash trees can transpire up to 63 liters of water per day during the growing season. Establishing an understory of different

species before the emerald ash borer arrives may help maintain the hydrologic function as well as wildlife habitat of lowland forests.

The current project was made possible through a Good Neighbor Authority agreement between the forest and the DNR that enables the DNR to award and administer national forest timber sales that have inventory and planning work already completed. Timber sale proceeds reimburse the state for its costs and remaining funds support projects, like the ash underplanting, to restore and maintain forest health.

"These are projects—both the timber sales and restoration—that we wouldn't be able to accomplish otherwise," said Forest Supervisor Paul Strong. "We value and appreciate the DNR's commitment to forest health across the state."

Established and expanded by the 2014 and 2018 Farm Bills, Good Neighbor Authority increases opportunities for finding new ways to work on projects, expands options for sharing skills and funding, and provides a creative and collaborative tool for restoring and managing public forestlands and watershed health.

"Our work with the national forest is a win for all of Wisconsin," said DNR Chief State Forester Heather Berklund. "The projects support the state's important forest products and tourism industries and address forest health issues, which benefits the public users and long-term sustainability of our forest ecosystems."

The DNR works in further partnership with counties, private consultants and organizations to accomplish projects under the Good Neighbor Authority. Detailed information about program timber sales, revenue and restoration projects is available on the DNR's website at <https://go.usa.gov/x6jUv>.

More information about the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest is available on the forest's website at www.fs.usda.gov/CNNF and through social media on Facebook and Twitter.

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