

Emerald ash borer forces Kentucky to retreat

James Bruggers, jbruggers@courier-journal.com 3:31 a.m. EDT April 5, 2014



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Kentucky officials have called a retreat in their five-year battle to contain the invasive and deadly emerald ash borer.

They've ended wood quarantines in 30 counties, including Jefferson and Fayette, saying the insect has overrun enough of the state that they are ineffective.

The result is that people and businesses will be able to more freely move hardwood firewood and ash tree-related products around Kentucky, as well as between Kentucky and most adjoining states, including much of Indiana, authorities said Friday.

And the battle line against the invading pest has now been moved back (<http://pest.ca.uky.edu/EXT/EAB/welcomeeab.html>) to the state border and will be carried on solely by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

MORE | [Watchdog Earth coverage of ash borer \(http://blogs.courier-journal.com/watchdogearth/tag/emerald-ash-borer/\)](http://blogs.courier-journal.com/watchdogearth/tag/emerald-ash-borer/)

Officials acknowledge it also will likely make it easier for the insects that have already killed more than 25 million trees in the eastern United States to spread faster throughout Kentucky.

"Some people feel it's like giving up the state," said Bill Bauer, executive director of the Kentucky Forest Industries Association, during a break at the group's annual conference Friday in Louisville.

But for others, including sawmill operators, it could be helpful, he said.

Henry Christ, who runs a sawmill in Ohio County, said the patchwork of county restrictions on moving ash trees and lumber has been difficult to navigate.

Kentucky State Entomologist John J. Obrycki said state officials had little choice because the infestations were dispersing rapidly. Trapping and tracking their spread wasn't very effective, and federal funding to help pay for the tracking was drying up, he said.

Kentucky also will stop tracking the pest's spread in the state, he added.

Agriculture Commissioner James Comer agreed to the change.

"We just felt like the feds had more resources and eyes on the problem," said his spokeswoman, Holly Harris.

But when Kentucky decided to abandon its quarantine zones late last week, the federal government "had to protect the rest of the country," said Sharon Lucik, a USDA spokeswoman.

So a newly drawn map (<http://www.scribd.com/doc/216375436/EAB-ContiguousFedQ-Map-20140403-LegalSz-Web>) now shows that Kentucky joins Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Michigan, West Virginia and several other states as a contiguous quarantine zone.

Regulated ash-related products — including hardwood firewood, nursery stock and green lumber of ash, and any ash logs, stumps or compost — can only be moved outside of that larger multi-state area under certain conditions, federal officials said.

Indiana still has some counties in the southwest that are in a protected zone, where firewood and ash-related products cannot be taken, Lucik said.

The Kentucky Division of Forestry has estimated that Kentucky has more than 220 million green and white ash trees in the state, which are susceptible to attack.

The Courier-Journal two years ago reported that the borer had begun to wreak havoc on Jefferson County's sizable ash population, and local tree advocates have been calling on the city to mount a vigorous fight. Estimates are that Jefferson County alone has 2.5 million ash trees, comprising roughly 10 percent to 17 percent of the county's tree canopy.

Paul Cappiello, executive director of Yew Dell Botanical Gardens, said he suspects that the emerald ash borer has spread well beyond the 30 Kentucky counties where it's been identified.

"The horse is already out of the barn," he said.

But he said he does not like how the change sends a message in Kentucky that moving firewood around is acceptable.

"We've finally started to make some progress on getting people to think before they pack the car with wood on the way to the cabin," he said. "That's a way of thinking that we should be encouraging, not abandoning."

Obrycki agreed, saying firewood can carry a number of forest pests, including the ash borer, and an even bigger threat that's now in southern Ohio — the Asian longhorn beetle.

"We will need to come up with better policies for that," Obrycki said.

Lucik said USDA discourages long-distance movement of firewood.

Mammoth Cave National Park does not allow anyone to bring firewood into the park.

But Kentucky State Parks has a policy in which parks still may allow in firewood from within the same quarantine area. With the change, all state parks are now located in a quarantine area, which would mean firewood could be brought into all state parks from anywhere in the state.

"We will be revising our policy," said Gil Lawson, a parks spokesman, adding that the department will likely retain a ban on all non-USDA certified firewood from other states.

Indiana Department of Natural Resources limits firewood brought to state parks, forests or other properties it manages to kiln-dried scrap lumber, or other wood that bears the USDA compliance stamp, or has had all its bark removed.

Kentucky officials will continue to experiment with biological control methods to curb emerald ash borer, such as introducing predatory wasps, which has been done in Louisville, Obrycki said.

"Local communities can come up with plans on how to address this in their communities," Obrycki said.

Reach reporter James Bruggers at (502) 582-4645 or on Twitter @jbruggers.

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