

Bringing Knowledge to Life in

Oakland County

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Fall 2007

Emerald Ash Borer Field Day spotlights campus, field, industry collaboration



Field Day demonstration

Southeast Michigan has been battling the emerald ash borer (EAB), a non-native insect that kills native ash trees, since 2002. We have the dubious distinction of being the first place outside its native Asia where an EAB infestation was detected.

To all but a few entomologists this killer was an unknown. There was little information on its biology, habits, natural enemies or susceptibility to insecticides. The vulnerability of North American ash trees guaranteed EAB an unimpeded path of destruction.

During the past five years, 15 million ash trees have been killed in this region. During this same time, researchers and tree care professionals have learned much about EAB biology, habits and management. There are now promising management options for protecting high-value ash trees.

In a collaborative effort to help tree care professionals across Michigan and beyond manage EAB in their landscapes, David Smitley, MSU entomologist and Mary Wilson, Oakland County MSU Extension horticulture educator, developed a field day this past August.

One hundred and twenty tree care professionals from Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and Minnesota gathered in West Bloomfield to see the latest research results in the search for saving individual ash trees from EAB. Attendees saw demonstrations using insecticides and application techniques and heard several arborists' success stories.

A follow-up survey assessed participants' learning and revealed whether or not the tree care professionals had begun incorporating what they learned into their management practices.

Survey results showed the following:

- 85 percent of the participants gained knowledge to help manage EAB more effectively.
- Of those participants currently treating ash trees, 42 percent changed their EAB management strategies.
- Of those participants not currently treating ash trees, 20 percent changed how they plan to manage EAB in the future.

Smitley and Wilson were pleased with the results and anticipate that others facing the challenges of EAB will be equipped with information to develop management plans.

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"I have a greater level of comfort and confidence in the use of chemical treatments after attending the seminar."

-EAB field day participant

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Michigan State University Extension helps people improve their lives through an educational process that applies knowledge to critical issues, needs and opportunities. Offices in counties across the state link the research of the land-grant university, MSU, to challenges facing communities. Citizens serving on county Extension councils regularly help select focus areas for programming. MSU Extension is funded jointly by county boards of commissioners, the state through Michigan State University and federally through the US Department of Agriculture.

Volunteer Conservation Stewards “Bringing Knowledge to Life”

In February 2006, MSU Extension in Oakland and Livingston counties served as pilot sites for the Michigan Conservation Stewards Program (CSP). The unique program gives individuals a solid conservation and natural science background in the context of healthy ecosystems. Topics covered include Michigan’s conservation heritage, ecology, forestlands, grasslands, wetlands, and lake and stream ecosystems.

This year, Oakland County MSU Extension graduated a second CSP class. In just two years 73 dedicated, knowledgeable and well-prepared Oakland County residents have completed the Conservation Stewards Program.

To date graduates have given more than 3,762 volunteer hours of conservation management activities valued at \$70,612 (based on Independent Sector’s estimate of one volunteer hour being valued at \$18.77). They have also completed more than 408 hours of advanced training.

The Conservation Stewards Program has already shown valuable results. A few examples of volunteer service performed include:

- wildlife surveys on birds, butterflies, frogs and toads
- nest box monitoring
- invasive species control
- prescribed prairie ecosystem burns
- educational activities throughout Oakland County

“CSP did a great job in educating me on the various environments from oak savannahs to fens and the impacts of invasive species on native plants. Overall, CSP gave me a great breadth of knowledge on a large number of conservation issues. CSP has been an excellent learning experience and I hope to continue contributing to the overall improvement of our state’s ecology for many years to come.”

**- Dick Johnston, Manager
Facilities Maintenance and Operations
Oakland County**



Stewards examine aquatic plants on Seymour Lake

Partners have also reported an increased ability to leverage grant funding because of the increase in numbers of skilled volunteers.

In August an advanced training was offered on lake ecology. Participants did classroom work at Independence Oaks County Park and field work on Seymour Lake.

As a result of the day-long workshop 81 percent of participants who responded to a follow-up survey reported they are confident they have the ability to develop critical lake management considerations. More than one third (38 percent) said they plan to teach other people how to determine a lake’s sensitivity to nutrients.

In appreciation for their dedicated and tireless appetite for learning, and commitment shown through volunteering, the Conservation Stewards in Oakland County were recognized during an outdoor celebration at Independence Oaks.

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“The Conservation Stewards are wonderful volunteers. I don’t know what I would do without them. Their commitment and educational training make them excellent volunteers for the Oakland County Parks. This is definitely a win/win arrangement. Thank you for connecting Oakland County Parks to these wonderful people.”

**-Kathleen Dougherty, Natural Resource Educator
Oakland County Parks and Recreation**

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