

# SUCCESS

REGIONS 1 & 4, STATE AND PRIVATE FORESTRY

OCTOBER 2011



*Concentration of ash trees is higher in the Great Plains than anywhere else in the United States.*

*The project developed and conducted statistically valid inventories of areas not previously included in forest land inventories, involving urban and community forests, rural forests, and agro forests, including windbreaks.*

*Those inventories are a critically important contribution since there was no previous quantifiable method to determine the number of trees threatened by the emerald ash borer in the region.*

*Using existing and new materials, the education outreach focused on key groups: agency and state extension staff, campgrounds, fuel wood businesses, legislators and government leaders, as well as the general public.*

## Great Plains Tree and Forest Invasive Species Initiative

### **Four States Mobilize in Response to Insect Threatening Millions of Ash Trees**

*In the 1960s and 70s, when Dutch elm disease killed between 40 to 50% of the elm trees in the United States, it's estimated that 40 to 50% of the dead elm trees were replaced with ash trees. Now an introduced insect pest from China is posing a significant threat to those ash trees.*



There are a lot of ash trees threatened by the emerald ash borer in the Great Plains. About 4.1 million ash trees have been inventoried in Great Plain communities through the Great Plains Initiative. Another 80 million ash trees have been identified as at risk in rural areas, including windbreaks, riparian corridors, or small treed lots. The ash trees represent 20-40% of many community forests in the region and 20-30% of riparian forests.

As the state agencies worked together, the question was how were they going to manage the removal, disposal, and replacement of this important native tree in the 5 to 10 years after emerald ash borer arrives in the Great Plains?

Tom Claeys of the North Dakota Forest Service, an Initiative participant says: "This was a great project for all four state forestry agencies to work together on. We started working on a common issue, the emerald ash borer, but it's expanded beyond that issue. We understand each other and work well together because of the similar missions and shared conditions of our agencies."

Emerald ash borer is a highly invasive, exotic insect that attacks and kills all species of North American ash trees. Since its introduction from China in the early 1990s, the borer has killed more than 50 million ash trees across the Midwest, Eastern US, and Canada. Emerald ash borer is spread primarily through the transport of infested firewood and nursery stock.

Funded by a US Forest Service grant and matching state funds, state forestry agencies in North Dakota, South Dakota, Kansas, and Nebraska are working together in an unprecedented region-wide effort to prepare for the arrival of the invasive pest.

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Before and after photos of emerald ash borer impacts.

Steve Rasmussen, district forester with the Nebraska Forest Service, served as the coordinator for the Initiative. Steve notes, “We learned as a group and then went back to our respective states and applied what we learned.”

The group held monthly conference calls, met face-to-face twice a year, and participated in training together. That allowed Initiative participants to stay focused on coordinating agreed-upon activities across their respective states.

The Great Plains Initiative gave the four states the platform to create a unified public awareness campaign, promote alternatives to ash tree plantings, prepare for the borer’s arrival by making an inventory of the region’s tree resources, and to address likely impacts from the insect to the region’s ash trees.

The overall goals of the Initiative were to:

- Substantially increase public awareness and capacity for quick action, once the pest arrives;
- Prepare states to act effectively through advanced, coordinated planning; and

- Detect pests early to allow individual and community action to “slow the spread”.

The Initiative included five major components:

- Tree Inventory;
- Education and Outreach ;
- Monitoring and Detection;
- Marketing and Utilization; and
- Species Diversity.

Ash trees make many positive contributions to the quality of life in the Great Plains. They provide shade, line streets, and create windbreaks and shelterbelts.

Forestry officials liken the arrival of the emerald ash borer in the Great Plains to a looming natural disaster with the scope and scale of a hurricane. They believe that region-wide, coordinated efforts like the Great Plains Initiative are a critically important step to preserving an integral piece of the fabric of life in the Great Plains; the ash tree.

*The Initiative developed a citizen monitoring and detection network that concentrated on training and involving state extension agents, the tree care industry, and interested individuals. The idea is to have a clearly identified process to report suspected occurrences of the pest.*

*In North Dakota, about 200 individuals have been trained as “first detectors”. These individuals are now familiar with the indicators of emerald ash borer and know where to immediately direct reports regarding suspected sightings.*

*One of the lessons the four states are trying to learn from is the historic experience of replacing trees killed by Dutch elm disease primarily with ash tree, setting the stage for the current potential for another region-wide loss of a predominate, native tree species.*

*While a limited number of tree species are suitable for the rigors of growing conditions on the Great Plains, there are a number of underutilized species that the Initiative is promoting for use in appropriate locations, including Ohio buckeye, basswood, Kentucky coffee tree, burr oak, and northern red oak.*