ARKANSAS FOREST HEALTH HIGHLIGHTS – 2025

The Arkansas Department of Agriculture – Forestry Division (hereafter "Forestry Division") provides support to private landowners in managing their forest resources. Forestry Division personnel assess forest health, provide management guidance, and respond to reports of tree decline caused by disturbances such as pests, diseases, and environmental stress. This report summarizes key forest health observations and disturbances identified across Arkansas during the 2025 calendar year.

Forest Resources Overview

Arkansas is home to roughly 19 million acres of forested land, representing about 56% of the state's total area. Non-industrial private landowners manage approximately 13.1 million acres, while the state's national forests account for nearly 2.5 million acres. Dominant forest types include oak-hickory, loblolly-shortleaf pine, oak-pine, and bottomland hardwoods.

For reference, the state's forests are mapped according to Level III Ecoregions. Loblolly pine is most common in the South-Central Plains, leading statewide in overall volume, with shortleaf pine second in abundance and particularly prevalent in the Ouachita Mountains. The most common hardwood species by volume include white oak, sweetgum, post oak, northern red oak, black oak, and southern red oak.

Southeastern Arkansas Pine Needle Browning and Mortality

Arkansas Forestry has been conducting large scale aerial and ground surveys across the state since 2023, to better understand and track the emergence of Brown Spot Needle Blight (BSNB). In 2023, a total of 6,835 acres of pine timber tracts were documented as having presence of BSNB.

In 2024, the same symptomology was observed, and a field collection was initiated. Trees showing visual symptomology were felled and sampled and sent to Forest Service laboratories for

confirmation testing. Samples were also tested by labs at Mississippi State for presence of dicamba and paraquat. For more information on this study, please contact Arkansas Forestry.

For the year 2025, BSNB continues to be ever present in the pine trees of Arkansas. University staff from University of Arkansas – Monticello have been working to track the pathogen complex on a county level and have confirmed many of the counties in the southern half of the state. Forest Health has responded to several calls throughout the year, both industry and private, related to the browning of pine trees and needle blight. As BSNB becomes more prevalent throughout the state, focus has shifted to educating county level personnel on the issue, to help combat the level of calls received about it.

Southern Pine Beetle (SPB)

SPB outbreaks have not been reported in Arkansas or states west of the Mississippi River for over twenty years. In 2025, the Forestry Division deployed 18 pheromone traps across the South-Central Plains. Trap captures produced zero positive catches for the second year in a row.

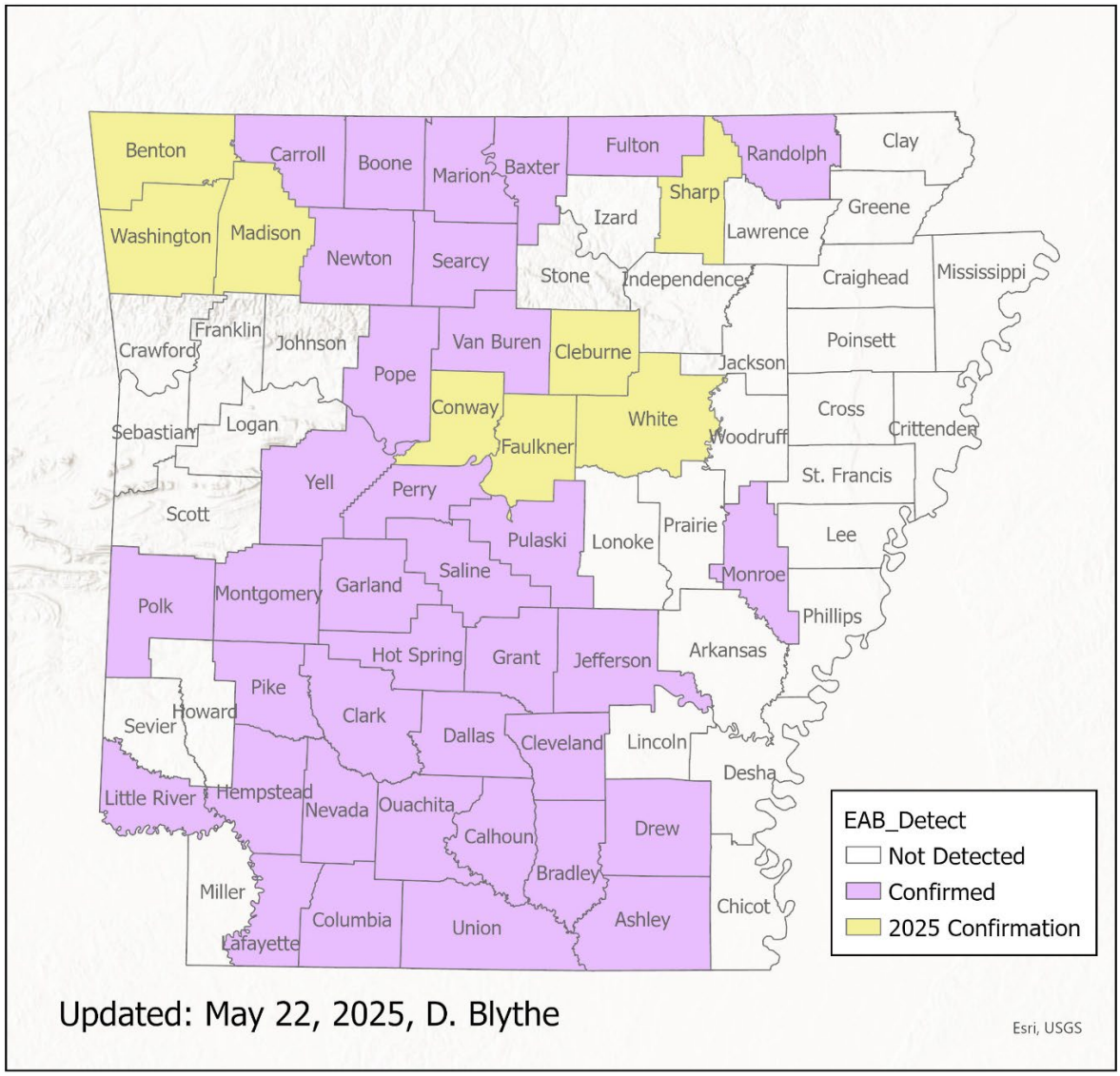
SPB Prevention Program
Preventing future outbreaks relies on maintaining resilient pine forests. The Southern Pine Beetle Prevention Program continues to incentivize landowners to thin dense stands through first commercial thinning, non-commercial thinning, prescribed burns, and in-woods chipping. Logging incentives are available for smaller tracts under 40 acres. Applications are accepted through local Forestry Division offices.

Emerald Ash Borer (EAB)

In 2025, EAB was confirmed in eight new Arkansas counties, with ash mortality expanding in the northwest. The Ozark National Forest continues to show widespread ash mortality. Arkansas now has 44 of 75 counties confirmed for EAB.

Mortality was observed in multiple counties in the northeast, but specimen extraction efforts were unsuccessful, and those counties remain unconfirmed. This will be a focus for the 2026 emergence season.

Counties With EAB Confirmed



Walnut Twig Beetle (Thousand Cankers Disease)

Walnut Twig Beetle (*Pityophthorus juglandis*) spreads the fungus *Geosmithia morbida*, which forms cankers under the bark and can lead to branch dieback or tree death. Black walnut (*Juglans nigra*) is the primary host.

From September into October 2025, Forestry Division personnel conducted a trapping study in northern Arkansas. Fifteen traps were deployed (11 "wet" traps with antifreeze, 4 "dry" traps intended for viable beetle collection). No suspect beetles were captured. Traps were analyzed in Little Rock.

Dry trapping efforts were coordinated with Forest Health staff at the University of Arkansas – Monticello (UAM). Bycatch of these traps were granulate ambrosia beetles (*Xylosandrus crassiusculus*), which were frozen and transported to UAM for culturing attempts of *G. morbida*. This lab testing has yet to be conducted.

This survey is scheduled for repetition in the fall of 2026.

Defoliators

Arkansas Forestry was alerted to a large defoliation event in south Arkansas in 2023. The culprit turned out to be an outbreak of a native defoliator, basswood leafminer (*Baliosus nervosus*). The pest, which has a larval and adult stage which produces different forms of defoliation, was seen feeding on numerous species of oak. This outbreak continued in the summer months of 2024.

Basswood leafminer was again observed in southern Arkansas during June–July 2025, again in the same areas as past years. Aerial and field assessments confirmed leaf skeletonization and browning of oak foliage, but no tree mortality occurred. This marks the third consecutive year that basswood leafminer has had a sustained outbreak in the area. While no observed tree mortality has been documented from the pest, repeated heavy defoliation events are a cause for concern for future tree health and vigor in the Felsenthal NWR area.

Another defoliator, spongy moth (*Lymantria dispar dispar*), did have a single detection in the state trapping cycle for 2025. The positive was submitted to APHIS and confirmed for a genetic match, and further federal testing will take place in the county of interest (Van Buren).

Post Oak Decline

Reports started coming through in summer of 2025 of post oaks (*Quercus stellata*) in NE Arkansas showing signs of decline. Spotty foliage, thinned crowns, and branch dieback were constant symptoms described in these reports.

Aerial survey and ground-truthing confirmed reports of post oak decline. This has been seen for a number of years in southern Missouri, and has slowly crept into NE Oklahoma and NW Arkansas.

The Missouri Department of Conservation had led efforts to identify the causal factor for this decline, and analysis thus far points to the causal agent *Tubakia spp.*, with some trees testing positive for *Tubakia iowensis*, the pathogen associated with Bur Oak Blight (BOB). Post oaks affected by this decline have been noted to show similar symptomology with bur oaks that have BOB.

As this is a newer issue for the state of Arkansas, monitoring will continue from state employees to track the spread and severity.

UA-Monticello Forest Health Research

The University of Arkansas at Monticello continues construction of the Arkansas Forest Health Research Center, slated to open in 2026. The facility will be dedicated to research on region-specific threats such as invasive pests and plants, diseases, and climate stressors.

Intended to open in stages, the initial opening of the facility will focus on lab research rooms and offices. Meeting and educational spaces will follow later in the year.

For More Information, Please Contact:

David Blythe, Forest Health Program Manager
1 Natural Resources Drive
Little Rock, AR 72205
(501) 902-5791
david.blythe@arkansas.gov

www.agriculture.arkansas.gov

The Arkansas Department of Agriculture is dedicated to the development and implementation of policies and programs for Arkansas agriculture and forestry to keep its Farmers and Ranchers competitive in national and international markets while ensuring safe food, fiber, and forest products for the citizen of the state and nation.

Funding for Arkansas Forest Health Program is provided by the USDA, FS Consolidated Program Grant, 25-DG-11083105-001