

Sharing Oak Wilt Advice across States, Provinces

The Challenge:

Oak wilt is a significant threat to forest health in the Eastern United States. This disease has been found in both the Midwest and Pennsylvania. However, it has also recently been confirmed in multiple locations in New York State and in counties on the edge of its known distribution. New England natural resource managers and their Canadian counterparts in Manitoba and Ontario were concerned the disease was moving toward their forests, so they wanted to be prepared to respond appropriately.

The Solution:

The Northeast and Lake States Fire Protection Compacts recently expanded their agreements to share firefighting funding resources to also cover forest health issues. This expansion gave forest health program managers an opportunity to train resource managers on the expanding edges of oak wilt distribution about how to detect and manage oak wilt. The 4-day training session was held in August 2019.

Resource managers from 11 States and 2 Provinces travelled to Minnesota and Wisconsin to learn from their peers about how to manage oak wilt in a variety of situations. Personnel from the USDA Forest Service Forest Health Protection units in St. Paul, MN, and Durham, NH, as well as the Northern Research Station in St. Paul, organized this valuable experience. Participants' organizations and the fire compacts covered the costs to attend. Many trainers from several organizations extensively contributed their time and expertise. More than 45 technical specialists participated as either trainers or learners in all or parts of the session.



Participants learned how herbicide treatments are used in Wisconsin to kill oaks around the perimeter of oak wilt pockets to stop the disease from moving through connected roots. (Courtesy photo by Sharon Reed, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry)

Resulting Benefits:

Attendees observed firsthand the symptoms of trees dying from oak wilt disease and learned about lab techniques for accurate diagnosis. They also saw the variety of unique management strategies agencies use on different site types. These included operating a vibratory plow in a regional park; using a root rupture technique on a national forest; girdling trees using an herbicide in a remote, rocky area; protecting high-value urban trees using fungicide injection; and using drones to detect oak wilt. Participants found the discussion on how to select appropriate tools for each unique situation extremely valuable.

Sharing Success:

The training revealed a variety of management solutions to deal with an emerging forest health problem and brought together multiple partners in a setting where they could discuss how to collaborate. Participants hope these fire compact funds will continue to be used to deal with major forest health issues. Participating trainer Linda Haugen described the value of the field training this way: "If you can find emerging pests quickly, it helps you to manage the issue by limiting their spread before they become epidemic."

"If you can find an issue quickly before it becomes an epidemic, it helps you to manage the issue better."



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