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**Nationwide, Celebrating Tree Check Month can Protect our Forests**

Michigan has seen its fair share of invasive tree pests impacting our forests, yards, and street trees. Species such as emerald ash borer and chestnut blight have been found in Michigan for some time, and cause huge losses of trees throughout the state. In hopes of heading off the next invader before it becomes well established, the USDA has declared August Tree Check Month, hoping to get residents and homeowners involved in looking out for new problems.

“Forest pests can be hard to find, since they are often very small and the changes can be difficult to notice in time if you aren’t familiar with the trees being hurt” says Eleanor Serocki, Coordinator for the SWxSW Corner Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (CISMA). According to Serocki, that’s why it is so important for homeowners to keep an eye out for new insects or die-back in trees. “You have a better idea of what is new or changing on your property, so the homeowner really is the first person to notice problems.”

Take for instance a new population of the “watch list” Asian longhorn beetle in South Carolina, which was first noticed by a homeowner. Because of the homeowner’s quick identification and report, the population is already being managed, well on the way to protecting the surrounding trees and forest land. The goal of outreach such as Tree Check Month is what we saw in South Carolina: quick action that helps communities work together to protect our trees.

“Here in Southwest Michigan, we have three major pests on our watch list, and now is a good time to keep an eye out for two of them.” says Serocki “Hemlock woolly adelgid is also a threat here, especially along our dunes, but at this point they are both more difficult and more likely to spread. Instead, we look for HWA during the winter.”

The first species of concerns is, Asian longhorn beetle (ALB), the same one USDA mentions in their announcement of Tree Check Month. This is a large black beetle with white spots and long antennae with blue stripes. ALB can also be detected from their large (pencil-sized exit) holes, scraped off egg laying sites, or the sawdust like frass they may leave at the base of trees. ALB is a concern in Michigan, as it’s larva eat their way though the water moving tissue of a number of common Michigan trees, such as maples, willows, and elms.

The other species to keep an eye out for is spotted lanternfly. Recently introduced in Pennsylvania, this leafhopper is quickly spreading, and could damage trees and crops alike. It particularly favors Tree of Heaven, an invasive tree, but can also be found on maples, grapes, and other woody species. The adults are brightly colored leaf hoppers, while the younger (nymph) stages look like ticks, only gaining red coloring as they age.

One last things to keep in mind as summer winds down is to avoid moving firewood for bonfires, camp fires, and home heating. Both Asian longhorn beetle and spotted lanternfly can move in firewood, which can quickly help them gain a foothold in new areas. The best practice is to purchase wood within 5 miles of areas it will be burned, or to only use heat-treated wood if it will have to be carried further.

If you do find a new or invasive insect in your trees, take photos of the insect and of the tree damage, catch the insect if possible, and store in your freezer in case it is needed for confirmation. As always, reports can be made through MISIN.msu.edu or directly to the CISMA at eleanor.serocki@macd.org. If you’re looking for information, photos, or reporting resources, check out the Midwest Invasive Species Information Network from Michigan State University at MISIN.msu.edu

The SWxSW Corner CISMA is a program to assist home owners, residents and municipalities understand, identify, and mange invasive species in Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren counties. This program is funded in part through the Michigan Invasive Species Grant Program, which is a general fund program managed by the DNR, EGLE, and MDARD.