



ATTENTION: News Editors, Environment Writers

Groups take action to defend Ontario's urban forests from Emerald Ash Borer

Urban Forest Stewardship Network takes a collaborative approach

(June 12, 2013, Toronto, ON – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE) The Urban Forest Stewardship Network (UFSN) connects grassroots organizations working on issues like Emerald Ash Borer (EAB), an invasive insect from Asia that is devastating ash tree populations across the province. EAB was initially discovered in Michigan and southwest Ontario in 2002. Since then it has moved eastward across the province. The introduced invasive pest from Asia tunnels underneath the bark, cutting off the flow of water and nutrients and killing the tree within a few years. There is a treatment derived from the neem tree seed that is injected into the base of healthy ash trees. If done every two years, the treatment can save trees. Member groups of the UFSN are spreading information about this issue, and what local residents can do in their own communities.

These groups, including LEAF (Toronto and York Region), ReForest London, GreenUP (Peterborough) and Neighbourwoods on the Grand (Centre Wellington), offer a variety of planting and stewardship programs that engage residents in addressing EAB. Initiatives range from tree planting programs to educational programs that help residents understand their options.

“We teach people about the signs of EAB in our presentations and training sessions, and we make sure they know about TreeAzin treatment, a bio-insecticide that can be effective in saving ash trees,” says Julie Ryan, Director of Programs at ReForest London.

According to the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, ash trees typically make up at least 10% of planted urban trees. Ash was planted in large numbers because it tolerates stressful urban conditions like drought, compacted soil and salt spray. There are an estimated 860,000 ash trees in Toronto and an estimated 500,000 estimated ash trees in London. Many municipalities across the province have already spent millions dealing with ash tree removals and replacement plantings.

“The loss of trees to EAB across Toronto and York Region is going to be devastating,” said says Janet McKay, Executive Director of LEAF. “We are training hundreds of volunteers to become EAB Ambassadors. They take information out to the communities where they live and share it with others.” The groups all encourage planting a wide variety of species to build a stronger, more resilient urban forest in the face of invasive pests like the EAB.

“We are working with our Township to raise awareness and undertaking school yard tree plantings as one response to the impending loss of our ash trees. We are also planning a fundraising campaign to treat two of our most majestic public ash trees,” says Toni Ellis of Neighbourwoods on the Grand.

Healthy urban trees provide preventative health care benefits through shade, filtered air, cleaner waterways, and reduced smog. When planted strategically, they reduce energy costs, increase property value and offer privacy. Trees also provide food and shelter for birds, butterflies and other wildlife, supporting our urban ecosystems.

“Our Ecology Park staff offer advice on the impacts of EAB and what options are available to the community. We also sell native trees,” says Vern Bastable, Urban Forest Program Coordinator with GreenUP in Peterborough.

The UFSN is supported by Ontario Power Generation (www.opgbiodiversity.ca). “As a partner in biodiversity protection and promotion, we’re pleased with the approach LEAF and the member groups are taking to help mitigate the effects of this devastating pest,” said Barb Reuber, Vice President of Environment at Ontario Power Generation. “Yard by yard, tree by tree, their efforts are making a real difference to the quality and well-being of our urban environments.”

The Urban Forest Stewardship Network (www.ufsn.ca) offers online resources for organizations, community groups and individuals working on urban forest initiatives across Ontario. The website offers a platform for sharing experiences, resources, and capacity-building tips.

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Additional photos are available upon request.



Volunteers get instruction on proper planting and care techniques during a stewardship event in Toronto. The Urban Forest Stewardship Network is encouraging tree planting and educational programs to help residents address the impact of the Emerald Ash Borer across Ontario. © 2013 Samantha O'Neill / LEAF