American Forest Foundation

Chicago Bureau of Forestry

Colorado State University, Department of Bioagricultural Sciences and Pest Management

Cornell University, Department of Natural Resources

Idaho State Department of Agriculture, Division of Plant Industries

International Maple Syrup Institute

Massachusetts Association of Campground Owners

National Association of RV Parks & Campgrounds

National Association of State Foresters

National Plant Board

Oregon Department of Agriculture

Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Bureau of Forestry

Purdue University, Department of Entomology

Society of Municipal Arborists

The Nature Conservancy

The Ohio State University, Department of Entomology

Virginia Native Plant Society

Stay Focused on the Impacts of Non-native Invasive Species: Strategic and Targeted Actions Can Make a Difference

Several recent articles have called into question the impact non-native invasive species[1] have on native ecosystems. They suggest that conservationists and natural resource managers should assess organisms on environmental impact rather than whether they are native or not and that with new global threats, actions and resources for controlling invasive species should be reevaluated. These articles (e.g., Davis et. al., 2011; Schlaepfer et. al., 2011) do make some interesting points in attempting to shake up the views of conservationists and others regarding invasive species, but from the standpoint of those actively addressing the problem of invasive pests of North American forests, even a partial dismissal of the harm of invasive species in sensitive ecosystems and in urban environments is risky.

The Continental Dialogue on Non-Native Forest Insects and Diseases is a national partnership of public and private organizations that are working collaboratively to prevent new infestations and minimize the ecological and economic impact of invasive species on our nation's trees and forests. The undersigned organizations, representing decades of experience with invasive species, are very concerned that these articles will cause informed stakeholders, as well as casual readers, to misinterpret the real ecological

[1] The Dialogue defines invasive species as an alien (non-native) species whose introduction does or is likely to cause economic or environmental harm or harm to human health (1999 President Executive Order 13112).

and economic impacts of many invasive species. In the current austere budget climate, controversial programs, whether related issues are accurately represented or not, are the most vulnerable to reductions. Many invasive species are causing huge economic impacts and quality of life issues for communities and homeowners around the country. In fact, a recent study (Aukema et. al., 2011) found that wood boring insects such as the Emerald Ash Borer and Asian Longhorned Beetle (ALB) are having a significant economic impact resulting in approximately $1.7 billion in local government expenditures and $830 million in lost residential property values each year.

We acknowledge, as pointed out in the articles referenced above, that some invasive species may present ecological benefits or at least cause less harm than expected. Yet, it is a fact that many invasive species cause irreparable ecological and economic damage in forests and communities. Insects and pathogens introduced to the U.S. have already drastically reduced, if not virtually eliminated, numerous forest species from North American forests including such iconic trees as the chestnut and the American elm. Others are currently threatening to do severe damage to black walnut, maple, ash, eastern hemlock, and coast live oak. These trees are valuable components of their respective ecosystems, with dependent wildlife and invertebrate species and also provide incalculable benefits to people. It is our experience that in many cases damage from invasive species could be, and indeed has been, prevented or mitigated by the combined efforts of an informed public, conservationists, land managers, and policy makers.

As it is, resource managers (both public and private) base their management decisions on the information available at the time, often with very limited resources and support. However, we know of no manager with the time or funds to pursue an invasive species based simply on its place of origin. A deficiency of funding forces resource managers to focus on only a few of the damaging invasive species – those that have indisputably negative impacts.

Many of the high costs of addressing invasive forest pests are related to the expense of removing dead and dying trees in urban forests in our most populated areas. These costs, both to communities and individuals, greatly increase when taking into account the decline in property values as a result of denuded streets, private properties, and parks. Since most invasive species first arrive and establish in urban environments, many management and regulatory programs are geared to mitigating their effects in cities and communities. This is done in part so invasive species do not spread to wildlands, where they can destroy timber and recreational resources and severely disrupt ecosystems.

While response programs are usually costly (e.g., close to half a billion dollars to eradicate outbreaks of ALB), the cost of doing nothing or of failing to contain these pests is ultimately much greater. In the absence of measures to prevent its spread in the U.S., ALB alone could cause the loss of 1.2 billion urban trees worth $669 billion.

The articles also neglect to identify successful invasive species management efforts, such as keeping the western U.S. free of established gypsy moth populations for 30 years and eradicating ALB from Chicago and other areas. The *Slow-the-Spread Gypsy Moth Program* of the U.S. Forest Service and state agencies

has slowed the spread rate of this invasive species by 60% – without the program about 50 million more acres would be infested with gypsy moth.

Participants in the Continental Dialogue note that Davis et. al. support programs aimed at preventing invasive species introductions. We are among the vast majority of conservationists who consider prevention to be the most effective strategy.

The authors' attempt to shift the current thinking on invasive species might unintentionally result in a relaxation of attention to the issue, not only by conservationists, but by the general public and policymakers. Such an outcome would significantly increase the damaging impacts of invasive species to our trees, forests, and communities.

Signed,

Paul, Bambei, President and CEO, National Association of RV Parks & Campgrounds

Robert Bendick, Director of U.S. Government Relations, The Nature Conservancy

Michael E. Cooper, President, National Plant Board

Donald A. Eggen, Forest Health Manager, Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Bureau of Forestry

Jodie Ellis, Agricultural Programs Manager, Idaho State Department of Agriculture, Division of Plant Industries

Jay Farrell, Executive Director, National Association of State Foresters

Marcia Galvin, Executive Director, Massachusetts Association of Campground Owners

Daniel A. Herms, Professor, The Ohio State University, Department of Entomology

Daniel J. Hilburn, Administrator, Plant Division, Oregon Department of Agriculture

William Jacobi, Professor of Tree Pathology, Colorado State University, Department of Bioagricultural Sciences and Pest Management

Jerri J. LaHaie, Executive Director, Society of Municipal Arborists

Mary Ann Lawler, Conservation Chair, Virginia Native Plant Society

Tom Martin, President and CEO, American Forest Foundation

Joseph McCarthy, Senior City Forester, Chicago Bureau of Forestry

Richard Norman, President, International Maple Syrup Institute

Kenneth Rauscher, Michigan Department of Agriculture, retired

Clifford S. Sadof, Professor and Extension Specialist, Purdue University, Department of Entomology

Mark Whitmore, Extension Association, Cornell University, Department of Natural Resources