NEWS RELEASE

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Date: August 29, 2011 Release No. DFO-05-11
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Asian longhorned beetle spreads through forests easier than previously thought, study finds

DURHAM, N.H.--The first evaluation of Asian longhorned beetle behavior, conducted in woods near Worcester, Mass., found the insect to be more of a forest threat than previously believed.

Most alarming, the study found that ALB spread easily throughout a forest stand.

“ALB readily moved through a forest and attacked trees throughout the stand,” said Forest Service Entomologist Kevin Dodds. Previous research suggested the insect might remain on the edges of forests and not be a strong traveler.

This latest observation troubles scientists and forest health managers alike, because it suggests ALB could disperse into forests of the region if not eradicated. It could then threaten the region’s tourism, maple syrup production and the wood product industries.

“If left uncontrolled, ALB could potentially alter the composition and structure of New England’s hardwood forests,” said Dodds.

While the insect was dormant, US Forest Service and Harvard University researchers conducted the study in Worcester, Mass. area forests to better understand the ALB population’s behavior on U.S. soil.

ALB (*Anoplophora glabripennis*) is native to China. Here in the United States the beetle is an invasive insect and a threat to native hardwood forests. ALB infests a wide variety of hardwood trees.

The insect was first detected in New York City in 1996. Efforts to eradicate this pest have resulted in the removal of tens of thousands of trees in New York, New Jersey, Illinois, Massachusetts and most recently Ohio.

Interestingly, the beetle only infested maple trees in forested stands, even though other host trees were present. In urban areas, ALB can infest a much wider variety of hardwood trees.

“Although ALB infested all maple species including sugar maple, it preferred to attack red maple in the forest,” said Dr. David Orwig, a forest ecologist with Harvard Forest. However, the potential threat to sugar maple also warrants further investigation, he added.

"The beetles' success in red maple could aid in the dispersal of the infestation," added Orwig. "Because of its wide geographical and ecological range, red maple could provide a pathway into other forests of the eastern United States."

Dodds and Orwig co-authored the study, "An Invasive Forest Pest Invades Natural Environments -- Asian Longhorned Beetle in Northeastern U.S. Hardwood Forests." The report was published in the *Canadian Journal of Forest Research,* Aug. 29.

Both authors agreed the results of this study only intensify the need for successful eradication of the beetle before it escapes further into the forest.

The field evaluations were conducted in cooperation with the Massachusetts Asian Longhorned Beetle Cooperative Eradication Program. Conducting this work during colder months allowed data to be collected in the forested stands prior to tree removal and eliminated any subsequent chance of beetle flight.

"Learning how the beetle behaves will be critical in helping us to eradicate it from northeastern hardwood forests," said Clint McFarland USDA Director of the Massachusetts Eradication Program.

On the Net: http://www.nrcresearchpress.com/doi/full/10.1139/x11-097

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