

Eradication of an Outlying Oak Wilt Infection in New York State

The Challenge

Days after receiving reports of sickly looking oaks from homeowners in Schenectady County, New York, during summer 2008, forest health officials launched an investigation. Soon after, Cornell Cooperative Extension confirmed the presence of oak wilt in the Empire State. Prior to this discovery, the nearest known infection site was in Erie, PA, some 200 miles away.

Oak wilt is a significant killer of red oaks that has been found in the upper Midwest and Mid-Atlantic States as well as Texas. Oak wilt can kill trees within 3 months after infection. According to Cornell researchers, all native oak species in New York State are susceptible to oak wilt. However, northern red oak, black oak, and pin oak are much more likely to die soon after contracting the disease. Oaks throughout New England are at similar risk if this disease spreads.

The Solution

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NY DEC) joined the U.S. Forest Service to treat oak wilt infection centers in the town of Glenville, NY. This area included the Glen Oaks residential neighborhood and surrounding forest lands. The goal of the effort was to completely eradicate oak wilt from the community.

The State requested Federal assistance to meet the shortfall in resources needed to control the disease and eradicate it from New York. The Forest Health Protection Program within the U.S. Forest Service's Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry provided a cooperative matching grant for the NY DEC to help bridge the funding shortfall.

Based on extensive oak wilt surveys, responders concentrated their efforts on three active infection centers within the Glen Oaks neighborhood. The NY DEC contacted all affected landowners to advise them that the Department intended to



Tree cutters remove infected oak trees from a neighborhood in Glenville, NY. (Photo by NY DEC)

eradicate oak wilt by removing and chipping infected trees, following U.S. Forest Service-approved treatment methods. Afterward, the NY DEC would treat the remaining stumps with herbicide.

The NY DEC held a public meeting in fall 2009 to discuss the project with homeowners and share information about diseases. NY DEC staff kept the media, including newspaper and television outlets as far away as Albany, up to date on the plans. Before and after photos were also taken to document the condition of the homeowners' yards.

Resulting Benefits

Forest health managers carried out their eradication plan in spring 2009 and halted the spread of this disease. Tree cutting and chipping that was completed by a contractor immediately afterward received high marks from both the State and the U.S. Forest Service.

Sharing Success

Eradicating oak wilt in Glenville showed that a cooperative State and Federal effort to halt the expansion of a devastating forest disease can be successful. Ongoing surveillance for oak wilt infestations, followed by successful eradication such as this, reduces the health risk to oaks across the Northeast and protects a valuable forest resource.

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