

Tree Climbing Training in Hardwoods

Innovative Program Helps Monitor Urban Forest Health Conditions

The Challenge

The Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, has a history of using tree climbing to accomplish its mission. Most Forest Service tree climbing has been done on conifers in the West. An urgent need for hardwood tree climbing expertise arose with the discovery of the Asian longhorned beetle (ALB) in several Northeast and Midwest cities. ALB attacks only hardwood species and initiates its attack in the crowns of trees. Climbers are better able to detect ALB infestations in the crowns than are surveyors on the ground.

The Solution

The Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry (NA S&PF) St. Paul Field Office took the lead in coordinating, facilitating, and conducting training in hardwood climbing techniques for current Forest Service tree climbers, to support pest surveys.

Resulting Benefits

- There is now a large cadre of certified tree climbers trained and experienced in hardwoods.
- These trained climbers routinely detail as tree inspectors on ALB eradication projects.
- The NA S&PF has two certified tree climbing trainers on its St. Paul Field Office staff to provide training in hardwoods and conifers in the Northeast and Midwest.
- These instructors also coordinate Forest Service tree climbing activities for the NA S&PF, Northern Research Station, and Eastern Region.
- In addition to ALB work, the trained climbers and instructors use their skills for—
 - Emerald ash borer research
 - Butternut and beech scion wood collection
 - Controlled pollination
 - Seed and cone collection
 - Hazard mitigation in high use and recreation areas

Trainers share climbing skills to defend against invasive insect species.



Tree climbing trainees gather on the Shawnee National Forest in Illinois. (Photo: USDA Forest Service staff)

- Upper bole tree coring
- Wilderness trail construction and repair
- Wildlife projects

Sharing Success

The NA S&PF tree climbing trainers provide from one to three training sessions annually. There are now trained Forest Service and state forestry agency climbers throughout the 20 Northeast and Midwest states served by NA S&PF.

The NA S&PF and the Superior National Forest worked together in fall 2010 to train and recertify 5 tree climbing trainers and 19 climbers from two National Forests, a Research Station, and an Experimental Forest.

NA S&PF and the Eastern Region now routinely provide climbers to assist with ALB surveys in New York, New Jersey, and Massachusetts. The climbers remain ready and available to assist as the need arises.



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