

# VERMONT URBAN AND COMMUNITY FORESTRY PROGRAM

## EAB Municipal Management Case Study

South Hero & Grand Isle County, Vermont

### APPROACH

*Education, Coordination, and a County-wide Approach*

### SUMMARY

Emerald ash borer (EAB) was confirmed in South Hero, Vermont in the fall of 2018, as only the fifth confirmed infestation in the state. The infested trees were first noticed by Sarah Packer, the sharp-eyed Vegetation Manager for the Vermont Electric Coop, while on vacation on the Island. In response, Bill Baron, a retired forester from the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation who lives in Grand Isle and serves there as the volunteer tree warden, formed the Grand Isle County EAB Task Force to coordinate a county-wide response to the challenges posed by the destructive pest. Although each of the 5 towns in the small county are collaborating with one another in their response to this invasive insect, South Hero was the first town in the county to share information about EAB at their town meetings, and to begin to remove ash trees.

The countywide Task Force's strategy has been to focus on educating residents and visitors on solutions that are appropriate for the island towns' small size. Task Force members from each community placed leaflets about EAB in Town Halls, put up posters warning people not to move firewood, and held several presentations and workshops about EAB. They invited Paul Gillies, a municipal lawyer and former deputy Secretary of State, to speak about tree law at one of the workshops.

In 2019, South Hero's tree warden and Select board member, Anne Zolotas, along with fellow Select board member, David Carter, conducted a pen-and-paper inventory of the ash trees within South Hero's public right-of-way. Zolotas and Carter counted at least 775 ash trees within the town right-of-way above 3 inches diameter at breast height. Of those, they estimated that about 10%, or about 75 trees, were 18 inches DBH or larger, and their removal would require a contractor with a crane. The remainder they believe are small enough to be removed with a chain saw by the road crew.

The Vermont Electric Cooperative (VEC) had already planned regular line maintenance for South Hero in 2020. Since, in response to EAB, the VEC's maintenance plan called for aggressive removal of ash under their utility lines, the town decided to wait to remove any ash trees until after VEC completed their tree clearing. VEC removed about 25% of the trees the town right-of-way. The next step will be for Zolotas and Carter to determine how to prioritize removal of the remaining large trees. Because the town needs to be cost-effective, they will manage trees under 18" DBH over the next ten years (or however long it takes the infestation to peak), on a case-by-case basis, and remove as needed.

## FAST FACTS

**Population:** 1,631

**Miles of Town Maintained Roads:** 20

**Number of Ash Inventoried on Town Roads prior to Removals:** 775

**Normal Management of Public Trees:** The tree warden addresses trees on case-by-case basis; three-person road crew from South Hero often collaborates and shares workers and equipment with neighboring Grand Isle.

**Active Tree Board or Conservation Commission:** None. There is a tree warden.

**Local Tree Ordinance:** None.

**Ash Inventory Conducted:** 2019 pen and paper inventory conducted by tree warden and selectman.

**EAB First Detected:** 2018

**Written EAB Management Plan:** None.

**Ash Management Status in 2020:** Vermont Electric Cooperative aggressively removed roughly 25% (or about 195) of the ash in the town's right-of-way as

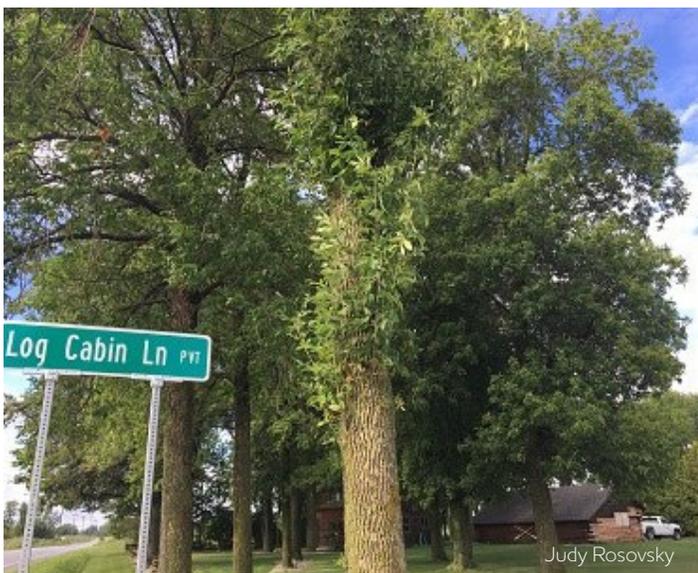
part of their regular line maintenance in 2020. The tree warden will determine which trees to remove next on prioritized case-by-case basis.

**Key Players:** Tree warden, Select board members, South Hero Land Trust, Grand Isle County Emerald Ash Borer Task Force, County Forester, Road Crew Foreman, and Vermont Electric Cooperative Vegetation Manager.

**Funding:** South Hero residents voted on an article at 2019 Town Meeting to set aside \$10,000 per year for ash removals. Grand Isle County EAB Task Force received a \$5,000 Urban and Community Forestry grant for EAB Preparedness. They hope to use part of this for a safety training for county road crews with The Game of Logging™ trainers.

**Wood Utilization:** Wood is left on landowners' property. Property owners are educated that wood should be burned or used on the property and not transported off the island.

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**Suspect Ash Trees, North Hero**



**Playground with Ash Trees on Grand Isle**

## ESTIMATED COSTS

South Hero removed several large cottonwood trees with a crane when they died. Based on the costs of removing the cottonwoods, Carter is estimating that it will cost approximately \$2,000 per tree to remove the largest ash (those over 18 inches DBH). These costs could be up to \$150,000. To address these anticipated costs, in 2019, South Hero passed an article including \$10,000 in the town budget to begin to set aside funds for ash tree removals.

Activity	Cost per Unit	No. of Trees	Work Done By	Estimated Costs 2019-2029
<b>Treatment</b>	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>Removal</b>	\$2,000 per tree for trees requiring bucket truck <sup>1</sup>	Roughly 600 - 650 <sup>2</sup>	Contractor, road crew, and Utility	\$113,500 - \$150,000, for trees removed by contractor
<b>Replanting: Cost of Trees &amp; Labor</b>	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$113,500 - \$150,000 over 10 years, or length of peak infestation</b>			

<sup>1</sup>In contrast, VEC, VELCO (Vermont's "transmission-only" electric company), and Vermont State Parks average cost for tree removal is \$125.00 to \$165.00 per tree. This is low cost due to these organizations' economy of scale.

<sup>2</sup>Approximately 67 trees are 18" or over DBH and will be removed by contractor with a bucket truck. Smaller trees will be removed by road crew.

### ON THE GROUND

*Keep telling the story and delivering the message as much as possible! It is easy for the EAB message to be lost right now with COVID-19. Prior to COVID, we would invite a reporter from the local paper to every Task Force Meeting, and make sure each Town Office has a good supply of informational material. We can't have in-person presentations now because of COVID, but we keep doing webinars.*

**Bill Baron, Chair of Grand Isle County EAB Task Force**

## COLLABORATING ON EAB AT COUNTY-WIDE LEVEL

After the 1998 ice storm the communities of Grand Isle County came together to form a county-wide Emergency Services Association. Residents saw how they were more successful at obtaining grants and addressing emergencies as a group than as individual towns. As such, Bill Baron, the current chair of the Grand Isle EAB task force, had already been thinking about county-wide EAB management strategies prior to the confirmation of EAB in South Hero in 2018.

The EAB Task Force started their county-wide approach by bringing together the tree wardens from each of the five towns. They then added representatives from the two local utility companies: Vermont Electric Cooperative (VEC) and Vermont Electric Company (VELCO). Additionally, each town select board was invited to send a member to the Task Force meetings. The Task Force also invited local private tree care and land clearing businesses to their meetings.

The Task Force's broad goals are education, outreach, and awareness. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, they met every 6 weeks, with the location rotating between the five towns. Each meeting focused on a different aspect of EAB management. For example: Attorney Paul Gillies spoke about legal issues; the County Forester, Nancy Patch, spoke about managing forested lands and woodlots; the arborist and Vegetation Manager for the Vermont Electric Cooperative shared maps of utility lines and the company's schedule for line maintenance. The communities also coordinated with one another on their ash tree inventories. Members use this data when they communicate with their Select boards about funding. South Hero has received \$10,000 for two years and Grand Isle passed \$10,000 in their budget for ash management at the 2020 town meeting. Baron believes that would not have happened without the work of the Task Force. Members of the Grand Isle EAB Task Force also worked together to coordinate hanging purple traps to monitor for EAB in all five towns. In 2019 their monitoring efforts resulted in a new confirmed infestation in Alburgh, and in 2020 EAB were captured in two of the traps in Grant Isle County.

### LESSONS LEARNED

- **Partner with local Land Trusts and Conservation Organizations.** Staff from the local land trust and conservation district have helped the Task Force with outreach and education. These efforts include: coordinating volunteers to monitor traps for EAB; establishing a long-term ash monitoring plot with the Vermont Land Trust; managing the EAB Task Force Facebook page; posting information on Front Porch Forum; hosting EAB tabling and speaking with residents at town meeting, and organizing webinars.
- **Make sure the tree warden works closely with the highway department and Select board.**
- **Include your county forester.** Our County Forester has been invited to all our meetings and has attended about two-thirds of them. She is very knowledgeable and helpful. If I can't answer a question, she can.
- **Include summer residents and second homeowners.** Our population changes due to the season summer has an influx of tourists and snowbirds so it is important for us to time our message so that we are capturing the greatest range of property owners and visitors.

#### Vermont Urban & Community Forestry Program

Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation in partnership with University of Vermont Extension

