

VERMONT FOREST PEST PLANNING

Lessons Learned

It's important to involve the Selectboard and Road Commissioner in the inventory and planning process. As Dorothy Allard of the Bakersfield Conservation Commission shared, "They know what's going on, and ultimately, it is up to them to decide what to do." Dorothy collected the data in a manner similar to how the Road Commissioner collected data for the town culvert inventory. Dorothy "tried to mimic [the culvert inventory] so it was easier to understand and interpret." Volunteers with Brattleboro and Hartford made a presentation to their Selectboard to share information and ask for their blessing to move forward with the inventory and planning process. When the plan was drafted the EAB planning group then shared their recommendations and sought feedback.

It would be beneficial for towns to appoint an official EAB coordinator (like Green up Day coordinator) and identify a Selectboard liaison/who to go to with questions. In some towns this could be the Tree Warden or First Detector. This provides volunteers and the EAB planning group with a formal role and is important for communications between the municipality and state and federal partners. Keep the core planning group small so the process is efficient (4-5 solid people). **Involve staff with the County Conservation District and Regional Planning Commission on your planning team as they can provide additional technical assistance, such as mapping and coordination.**

Budgeting, tree management and policies are made at the municipal level. **While each town is developing their own EAB plan many volunteers have found that collaborating with adjoining towns can be fun and important for not reinventing the wheel.** They shared important lessons together, information, and resources, and coordinated outreach and education efforts.

A RAPID assessment is a critical first step. It's important to collect the minimum information needed and prioritize which roads to focus. In Enosburgh, Nancy Patch noted that trees on back roads don't provide as many benefits, such as increases in property values, shade, and stormwater mitigation, compared to individual trees on the town green, streets or around homes. "If there was a different objective, for instance if it was street trees or a park, I would want to take more specific data."

Strike a balance between collecting too much data and not collecting enough data for making a reliable estimate. While the Hartford approach was very labor intensive, their data is very accurate, which increased the credibility of their management recommendations when working with entities with budget authority. There's no need to reinvent the wheel. Brattleboro and other communities are happy to share their protocols, forms and tools.

Tree ID is difficult for volunteers and students. Therefore, **it's important to train volunteers on ash tree identification, EAB signs and symptoms, and the survey protocol.** Involve trained foresters/arborists, naturalists, or others comfortable with tree ID. In Johnson, there was at least one of these folks in each car.

Student interns can provide boots on the ground for inventorying, help with mapping and research, and act as a catalyst for community action. It's important to note that students may not be as invested in the long-term compared to local citizens, so choosing the right role for them is important. A community will need to provide some level of oversight and guidance, hand holding, quality control, and project review.

Outreach and education is important at all points of the preparedness planning process. Volunteers with Brattleboro briefed the Selectboard about EAB at the beginning and got their blessing for moving forward. They then led an ash walk and put up posters to keep the community informed and then presented the inventory results and recommendations to the Selectboard. In Hartford, their Tree Warden, First Detectors and Tree Board members have featured pests in their annual report, sponsored walks and met with Public Works staff to discuss the issue. In Richford First Detector Annette Goyne enlisted the help of the Boy Scouts to spread the word in the July 4th parade. These are only a few examples of the great ways volunteers are spreading the word in their communities

Make it fun and the volunteers will come! It will be easier to recruit and keep volunteers if they have a good time while helping. Offering incentives such as lunch or snacks, as well as encouraging people to participate with friends will create higher numbers of volunteers. Geoff Beyer of Montpelier shared that inventory “is a good excuse to get out there and enjoy time with your family, friends, kids, or dog. When you look for ash trees I bet you’ll see a lot of other interesting things.”

Be realistic about how much time it will take and seek out volunteers willing to commit to an all-day inventory or fundraise to pay for people to do it. Sue Lovering with the Johnson Conservation Commission provides food and pastries at each meeting and event. As Little Tree, a First Detector in Hartford, noted “I’m concerned about invasives taking over. EAB wiping out ash is scary... [The planning process] is not going to go fast, be patient and chip away at it. Education is key and will be more and more [important] into the future.”

Volunteer First Detectors and other local tree champions have been critical. The degree of success (those communities where planning is happening) depends on the level of local leadership and capacity to mobilize people to action. Participating in the Forest Pest First Detector Training gave many of the leaders the necessary skills and education to correctly identify ash trees and the signs of the emerald ash borer that they used to train new volunteers.

VTinvasives.org provides a lot of resources. There’s no need to reinvent the wheel. As Nancy Patch with the Enosburgh Conservation Commission noted, “Our [EAB] plan that we have in progress really was taking information directly off of the website, cutting and pasting, then putting our own things together.” Professional help from your county forester, other forestry staff and volunteers is invaluable. Just ask.

These lessons learned were gleaned from interviews conducted by Erin Cain, Vermont Urban and Community Forestry Program Student Intern. Thank you to volunteers Shelly Stiles, Bob Everingham, Brad Goedkoop, John Akielaszek, Geoff Beyer, Robert Troester, Dorothy Allard, Nancy Patch, Doug Reaves, Sue Lovering, and Annette Goyne for participating in the interviews and sharing their process and lessons learned.