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December 28, 2010

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Re: Emerald Ash Borer threatens our communities

Dear Municipal Official:

I am writing to you regarding an invasive species that is threatening the ash trees in New York State and elsewhere. The Emerald Ash Borer, (EAB) or *Agrilus planipennis* was identified in June 2002 as the agent in ash tree decline and mortality in the Detroit metropolitan area. The infested ash trees displayed dying crowns in the second year of infestation and most died within five years. Recently, the EAB was found in Cattaraugus County, and will likely invade Erie, Chautauqua and Niagara Counties within the next few years.

The implications of such an invasion could be devastating for Western New York and beyond. To date, no way has been found to effectively stop the Ash Borer's destruction, and most credible observers fear a near-complete annihilation of New York's ashes in the coming decades.

It is projected that there may be 150,000 ash street trees in New York's municipalities and over 900 million in the entire state. Dealing with public safety threats from infested, dying and dead ash trees in urban and suburban areas will be expensive and will involve cutting down dying trees and replacing them with new trees or prolonged treatment with systemic insecticides. Just cutting the trees down, at a cost of $1,000 to $1,500 each, will mean an incredible expense to New York's municipalities. A study conducted by USDA Forest Service Northern Research Station projects a cost of $32,95 billion for New York State. It is important that municipalities begin planning for this eventuality and educating their citizens about this looming problem.

Other repercussions of an EAB infestation are likely to include decreased property values, losses in the long-term supply of ash wood, decreased air quality, increased electricity use during hot weather as tree shading is reduced, and negative impacts on Native American cultures that use ash wood for traditional crafts and ceremonies. In addition, there are likely to be serious impacts on wildlife and natural ecosystems.

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Given the already strained economic conditions we face statewide and nationally, I stress that working in cooperation with all levels of government is critical to manage the economic impacts of this invasive pest.

Researchers at SUNY ESF, Cornell University, and USDA ARS have conducted research on the EAB in New York and offer a few ways to slow the spread of EAB through an approach called SLAM, or **SL**ow **A**sh **M**ortality. This approach to EAB management will slow the spread and afford valuable time for communities and individuals to plan for EAB arrival and allow time for research to further refine management techniques.

1. Insecticides can sometimes be helpful, although they are not recommended for widespread use by homeowners, because the insecticides that may be effective in controlling EAB are toxic to other organisms and can get into streams and waterways. Professionally applied insecticides are most appropriate for high-value trees in yards, parks and along streets. Professional trunk injection of certain pesticides can provide up to two years of protection per treatment, but the costs can be high and the treatments must be repeated regularly because the EAB will remain in an area for years.

2. The DEC has adopted regulations to restrict the import of untreated firewood from other states and prohibit restrict the movement of untreated firewood long distances within the State. Only local firewood should be utilized since the interstate transport of firewood has been identified as one of the main ways EAB has moved across the country.

3. "Trap trees" can be created to attract adult EAB as both an early-detection method and as a way to limit the spread of EAB by providing them with an attractive, nearby target to lay their eggs. Trap trees are removed before the following spring, also removing any larvae that are in those trees. Trap trees are created by girdling them, causing them to emit certain chemicals, which signals the EAB that the tree is vulnerable and therefore an ideal location to lay eggs.

In addition, The SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry is working with the US Forest Service to investigate the use of a native, stingless wasp, with the common name of Smoky Winged Beetle Bandit as a possible early-detection technique for the Emerald Ash Borer. Research is being conducted in New York on the potential impact of the wasp in assisting in the detection of EAB populations. Smoky Winged Beetle Bandits have been found around the Central and Capital regions of the state.

Naturally, the solution to this problem, like many other issues with ecological implications, is to work through multiple tactics to reduce the impact of the EAB, with an emphasis on educating the public, particularly homeowners, as they may need to eventually deal with infected trees on their property.

Although I will not be serving as State Senator as of January 1st, I encourage those in office to work together to address this issue for the benefit of our communities and our shared environment.

Thank you for your time and please feel free to contact the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's EAB Hotline at 1-866-640-0652 or Cornell University Forest Entomologist, Mark Whitmore at mcw42@cornell.edu if you have any questions on the Emerald Ash Borer. More information on EAB is also available on the internet at:

http://www.nyis.info

http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/7253.html

http://www.emeraldashborer.info

Sincerely,

Antoine M. Thompson
New York State Senator, 60th District

Cc:
Chief of Bureau of private Land Services, Bruce Williamson
Mayor of City of Buffalo, Byron W. Brown
County Executive, Chris Collins
City of Buffalo Common Council
Erie County Legislature
Commissioner, Steven Stepniak
Mayor of Niagara Falls, Paul Dyster
Niagara Falls City Council
Supervisor Grand Island, Peter McMahon
Mayor of City of Tonawanda, Ronald Pilozzi
Regional Director of DEC, Abby Snyder
Niagara County Environmental Management Council.
Buffalo Environmental Management Commission, David Hahn Baker,
Buffalo Pest Management Board, Joseph Gardella
President & Chief Executive Officer Buffalo of Olmsted Parks Conservancy, Thomas Herrera-Mishler
Forest Entomologist at Cornell University—Dept. of Natural resources, Mark C. Whitmore