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Protecting a historic tree

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BY STACI WILSON



Joe Pipitone, of Top Notch Property Services in New Milford, inoculates the historic Green Ash located on the Green in Montrose against the Emerald Ash Borer, an invasive pest that has decimated ash trees. STAFF PHOTO/STACI WILSON

In 1903, the country's first Homesteader, Daniel Freeman, brought an elm tree from his Beatrice, Neb., property to Susquehanna County as local residents celebrated Galusha Grow – known as the father of the Homestead Act.

Grow, a prominent lawyer and politician, served in the U.S. House of Representatives and served as Speaker of the House from July 1861 to March 1863.

While Civil War events dominated the legislative session, under Grow several major pieces of legislation – including the Homestead Act of 1962 – were signed into law.

The elm tree – placed on the Green in Montrose in 1973 – succumbed to disease.

A Green Ash tree was flown from Nebraska's National Homestead Monument and was planted in place of the elm in 1973.

With the invasion of the Emerald Ash Borer – an Asian beetle that feeds on ash trees – the historic green ash now faces a fate similar to that of the elm it replaced.

Former Susquehanna County Forester Jim Kessler said ash trees are a major player among the beech and maple in the local forests, comprising about 10 percent of the wooded areas.

In the western part of the state, Kessler said the Emerald Ash Borer has killed most of the trees; and in Michigan and Wisconsin – where the EAB was first discovered – "it has killed essentially all of them."

In Susquehanna County, apart from the Green Ash at the historical marker, White Ash is the dominant variety, Kessler said.

Emerald Ash Borer

The invasive pest was first confirmed in Michigan and Ontario, Can. in 2002. Since then, the Emerald Ash Borer has branched out, coming into western Pennsylvania in 2007. EAB was first seen in Susquehanna County in 2014.

According to emeraldashborer.info, the adult beetles eat the tree's foliage. It is the larvae that do the damage. They feed on the inner bark, disrupting the tree's ability to transport water and nutrients.

The EAB is typically a bright, metallic, emerald-colored insect, about one-half inch in length. Its bottom side is coppery-red in color.

The beetle lays its eggs in the bark, with the larvae doing the damage to the tree's interior before emerging through a D-shaped hole in the bark.

Symptoms

On Thursday, July 30, local tree care expert Joe Pipitone, of Top Notch Property Services and Top Notch Tree Care, of New Milford, and EAP urban forestry expert Trent Dicks of Arborjet, applied a treatment to the stately Ash that will protect it from infestation.

Dicks said, "If we don't treat the tree, it will die."

"EAB starts its attack from the tender part up top," Pipitone said. "By the time you see it, (the tree) might be in a state of decline past saving."

The canopy dieback begins in the top one-third of the tree and progresses until the tree is bare, according to information put out by Michigan State University Extension.

Another sign to look for, Pipitone said, is the tree sprouting "new life" from its base. At that point, damage from the EAB is "probably far advanced."

The D-shaped hole creating by the emerging EAB is another tell-tale indicator; as is a heavy presence of woodpeckers.

With EAB first discovered in Susquehanna County in March 2014, Dicks said it is recommended that trees within 20 miles receive treatment.

Without treatment, within three to five years, Dicks said, the untreated ash trees will be wiped out.

Treatment

Dicks recommends treatment for ash trees located near homes or ones that property owners value.

In order to treat the tree, holes were drilling into the base of the tree; plugs with injection needles were set into the holes; and the chemical "TREE-age" was delivered into the tree.

Pipitone said the treatment would then travel up the tree, and distribute it throughout the canopy.

The TREE-age kills both the EAB adult and larvae; and the direct injection into the tree prohibits exposure to the surrounding soil.

Since the product is not sprayed on the leaves or bark, animals that come in contact with the tree, like squirrels or butterflies, are not affected by the insecticide.

The treatment lasts for two or more years and has been 99 percent effective. Pipitone plans to return in two years to re-inoculate the tree.