

Oak Wilt – General Management Information

Oak wilt disease was confirmed for the first time in Bayfield and Douglas counties and in 16 new northern townships in 2018. Oak wilt is caused by a deadly fungal disease that initiates tree death within just a few weeks after infection. Oak wilt negatively impacts property values, the forest industry, and recreational opportunities across the county and northern region. Bayfield County is home to some of the densest oak woods in the entire state.

In Bayfield County, the disease was recently found in the towns of Barnes, Cable, and Drummond. In Barnes and Drummond, all of the roughly half dozen diseased oaks were found along the right-of-way of County Highways N and A. The primary cause of infection was determined to be ROW brushing during the riskiest time of the year—April 15 to July 15, when fungal spores readily infect open wounds. These are just the known infected locations. It is very likely that more infected trees are in the area, but haven't been discovered yet.

These infected oaks must now be cut down and destroyed to prevent fungal spore production and distribution in this area. After tree death, healthy oaks growing up to 100 feet away may also be infected when the disease continues to spread belowground through root grafts. This makes disease control costly and often impossible—so disease prevention is key. If diseased trees are not treated promptly, spores can spread to otherwise healthy trees or stands in the area.

A number of state, county, and municipal organizations have policies and practices in place to prevent (limit) the spread and damaging impact of oak wilt (see below). The main theme of all of them is to **avoid harvesting, pruning, brushing and any injury to oak trees between the months of April through July**. Another strategy by one county is to conduct brushing activities only on non-oak areas: non-forests, aspen stands, lowland forests, or pine stands.

1. Bayfield County Forestry and Parks Department

- If oak density (basal area) is greater than 15 square feet/acre and the nearest infestation is within 6 miles of a stand that will be managed, then the following restriction is applied: “No harvesting operations will be allowed between April 15 and July 15.” Similar restrictions apply for trail work or any other activity that would result in cutting, pruning and/or wounding oak trees. Certain exceptions and modifications may apply subject to proper documentation and Department approval.

2. WI DOT – Section 201 Clearing and Grubbing 2017 201.3 (4)

- “Prevent the spread of oak wilt by treating cut surfaces and abrasions sustained between April 1 and September 30 by healthy oak trees and saplings with a thorough application of tree paint immediately upon discovering wound. Between these dates, also paint the cut surfaces of the stumps of living oak trees and saplings immediately after cutting, whether remaining in place or grubbed.”

3. Public Service Commission – PSC 113.0511 Oak tree cutting and pruning

- “In urban/residential areas: From April 15 through July 1 of each year, no pruning or cutting of live oak trees is permitted except in emergencies.”

- “In rural areas: From April 15 through July 1 of each year, pruning paint must be applied to all final cuts on live oak trees immediately after cutting.”

4. WI DNR lands

- “Do not harvest or conduct activities that may wound oaks April 15 - July 15.” Certain exceptions and modifications may apply subject to proper documentation and forester approval.

5. USDA National Forest Service Lands

- For timber sale harvests, “No harvesting (or other activities that may damage oak trees) will be allowed in stands with greater than 20 square feet of oak basal area per acre between April 1 and July 15”, some exceptions apply depending on the objective of stand treatments.
- For trails, campgrounds, utility corridor maintenance and road sides- “Do not harvest or conduct activities that may wound oaks April 1 - July 15.”

6. Town of Woodboro roadside brushing ordinance:

- “The Town of Woodboro will not mow or brush the town roads before July 15.”

More information on oak wilt, including forest health factsheets and management guidelines, can be found on the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources website at:

<https://dnr.wi.gov/topic/foresthealth/oakwilt.html>

If you have direct questions or concerns regarding oak wilt, please contact Paul Cigan, WDNR Forest Health Specialist (Northwest zone). His phone number is 715-416-4920 and email address is

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