

## **Insects and Disease**

By David Falkenham, UNH Cooperative Extension, Grafton County Forester

June and July are crazy months; after a normally dry beautiful May, June and July are usually hot, humid and sticky. Not good weather for a forester and his old black dog, but it is great weather for the insects, disease and other factors that affect the trees in Grafton County.

Early summer is a time of growth for plants and trees. Lush green forests, fields and farm land are the photographic trademark of summer. This fast rate of growth attracts a lot attention from insects and disease that want to feed on our trees. Remember they too have a short growing season to complete their life cycles, so they do it in a fast and furious manner and there is often not much we can do about it.

Many of the problems we see are native pests that occur on an annual basis. Every once in a while we get a "bumper crop" of native pests and that gets people's attention. This year and last the classic examples are the oaks and pines. The pine trees in NH and VT are suffering from a fungus known as White Pine Needle Cast which is causing the pine needles to turn brown and fall off. This is a fungus that is in our forests every year, and can be seen in a spotty fashion. This year we had a bumper crop of White Pine Needle Cast and all the pines turned brown and started dropping needles in a few short weeks in early June. The word from the forest pathologists in NH and VT is that this epidemic should be short lived and the trees will green up again, with a few of the weakest pine dying out. I have noticed recently that a lot of the pines look much better after the recent rains.

Another problem we are having is an insect know as the Oak Leaf Roller, given its name by the way it rolls up the leaves to lay its eggs. This pest, which also strikes in early June, gives the oaks a very scraggly look due to the feeding on the leaves. I noticed an infestation of this pest on the County Lands in North Haverhill and had a small panic attack myself. There was nothing I could do about it so I simply monitored the situation. At present those oaks have almost fully recovered and look fine. Trees are amazing plants; they always have a reserve of energy to combat what may appear to be even the worst physical and biological problems.

It is always important to consider the environmental conditions that affect our trees. Weather and site conditions play a huge role in how our trees appear physically and how the trees respond to insects and disease outbreaks. Trees at high elevation or on dry sites are always at risk because they have to work so hard just to survive. Early this spring everything was blooming nearly two weeks ahead of normal. However, in May we experienced a succession of hard late frosts. On May 11, Windy Ridge Orchard in North Haverhill recorded a morning temperature of 18 degrees, and on May 13 the temperatures went well below freezing again. This one-two punch had a detrimental effect on local fruit producers and was hard on our forest trees as well. Many of the oaks lost their early leaves and even the high elevation sugar maples suffered early defoliation. This frost was accompanied by a short drought further weakening the trees. Some of us in the forestry community believe that the severe late frosts and the drought exacerbated the later outbreaks of Oak Leaf Roller and White Pine Needle Cast.

I assure you our trees are fine, they are having a tough year but they will be fine. Please continue to contact me with your questions. Although many problems are common native pests exacerbated by environmental factors, other problems such as Gypsy Moth, Dutch Elm Disease, Chestnut Blight, Asian Longhorned Beetle and Emerald Ash Borer are not native and can cause

serious problems for our trees. Citizen reports are our first line of defense against these threats.

If you have any forest or tree related questions I will be on hand during the Grafton County Open Dairy Barn Day on July 24<sup>th</sup> from 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m. We will be having raffles, hay rides, tours and a cook out. At 1:30pm I will be giving a tour of the County Woodlands highlighting the management of the property. Hope to see you there!