

# A Walk in the Woods - September 2015

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Almost by definition, a walk in the forest should relax, rejuvenate, and renew. Research and my personal experience shows this to be true.

For the most part, when I walk in the woods, I come home feeling relaxed and happier than when I started. Walking in the woods is guaranteed to distract me from whatever ails me—family, work or general malaise. There are just too many beautiful and magnificent sights, even on the smallest woodlots.

Though I'm not typically a woods-worrier, lately one thing has been bugging me during my woods-walks and that is literally a bug—the emerald ash borer (EAB). This ash-killing, non-native insect was first found in the U.S. in the Detroit area in 2002. Detroit is one of the major shipping ports in this country—huge volumes of trade happens along the Great Lakes, linked to the Atlantic Ocean by way of the St. Lawrence River. EAB was shipped into this country on untreated wood packaging known as dunnage. Imported wood now needs to be heat-treated, but this step was taken too late to protect our ash.

In too few years EAB made its way to 25 states, including New Hampshire. We found it in Concord in 2013. Though EAB is a good flier, it didn't traverse the country on its own. It radiated out from the Midwest in nursery stock and wood products, especially as campers brought their infested firewood with them on camping trips. We now have quarantines in place limiting the movement of ash products, including firewood, but EAB is here to stay and the best we can hope is to “slow the spread.”



Since EAB's discovery, millions of ash have died due to infestation. Though we can effectively inject street-side and home-grown trees with insecticides, the ash I see on my woods-walks can't be treated this way. There are too many, they are too scattered, and it would be too costly.

When I cross streams or small swales, walk along larger streams and rivers, or tromp through northern hardwood stands—all places where the ash grow—I find myself looking for ash. If I spy one, I look for the tell-tale sign of the “blonded” bark caused by woodpeckers as they forage for EAB larvae developing in the life-giving cambium and phloem.

I consider this unconscious attention—looking for ash and then looking for the insect when I find the ash—as woods-worrying and I resent it, but I can't help it.

Though a minor component in most New Hampshire forests, ash is a beautiful tree. Often straighter than neighboring trees and limbless for most of its trunk, ash resemble light-colored, green-topped telephone poles scattered throughout the forest. Ash is economically valuable and grows in sensitive ecological areas like floodplains, black ash swamps, and enriched cove hardwood stands at the base of slopes. I know of more than one woodlot owner who has nurtured ash as part of their woodlot for decades, designating their ash as the crop tree—the tree they plan to grow for the longest time to the maximum maturity. EAB has changed their plans.

As of this writing, we've found EAB in ten New Hampshire towns. Though not in Grafton County, we've found it in bordering Sanbornton. The N.H. Division of Forests and Lands maps known EAB-infestations and also created management zones with suggestions for homeowners and woodlot owners. Maps and recommendations are on [www.nhbugs.org](http://www.nhbugs.org). If you have ash, we suggest you inventory the size and value of your ash so you can plan. I also invite you to look for signs of EAB and if you find a suspect tree or insect, report it including uploading pictures at [www.nhbugs.org](http://www.nhbugs.org).

I'm sorry to invite Grafton County residents to join me in worrying about the fate of your ash as you walk in the woods, but I can't help it.

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