

The Nature Conservancy supports the Administration's FY08 plan for the USDA Forest Service to spend \$300,000 to improve understanding and contain the spread of Laurel Wilt. Of this total, \$250,000 is for research programs, the remaining \$50,000 is for State and Private Forestry.

## What is Laurel Wilt?

Redbay trees in South Carolina, Georgia, and northeastern Florida are being killed by a disease caused by a previously unknown pathogen which is carried from tree to tree by an introduced Asian ambrosia beetle. This forest disease is also known as Redbay Wilt.

## Where is Laurel Wilt Established?

As of January 2007, Laurel Wilt is present along the Atlantic coast from Charleston SC to south of Jacksonville FL. An outlying infestation is present in Indian River County FL.

## Ecological Threats from Laurel Wilt

Redbay trees in three states are being killed by this disease. Other trees and shrubs in the same family, including Sassafras, Spicebush, and Swamp bay, are vulnerable to the disease. Early information indicates that Pondberry, a federally listed endangered species, is also at risk. Tests of avocado (which is in the same plant family) have not yet proved whether the fruit is vulnerable to the disease complex.

Redbay fruit is eaten by wild turkey, bobwhite quail and several species of song birds. Deer also consume the fruits and leaves. Caterpillars of the Palamedes Swallowtail Butterfly depend on Redbay and Swamp bay. A second butterfly, the Spicebush Swallowtail, is dependant on other plant species in the family Lauraceae and might be harmed if the pathogen proves to damage additional woody plants in that family.

## Economic Consequences of Laurel Wilt

- **Tree removal and replacement in rural, urban, and suburban communities.** Park managers at Timucuan National Preserve and affected municipalities already face rising costs for removal of dead and dying trees that pose a hazard to the public.
- **Potential damage to the Florida avocado industry.** If the Florida avocado turns out to be susceptible to the pathogen, a crop worth \$14.5 million in 2004-2005 will be at risk.



*Cross-section of a Redbay tree showing the damage by the introduced Asian ambrosia beetle and pathogen. © James Johnson Georgia Forestry Commission*



*Redbay wilt has killed trees that once lined this yard.*

## What is Being Done to Protect Our Forest and Yard Trees from Laurel Wilt?

USDA Forest Service has funded both surveys to determine the extent of the infestation and research to answer questions vital to determining what management actions might be useful. Research topics include efforts to develop a lure for detecting the beetle and studies to determine the range of plants susceptible to this disease.

Significantly increased research is needed to improve our understanding of the beetle's ability to transmit the fungus and to determine the virulence of the pathogen.

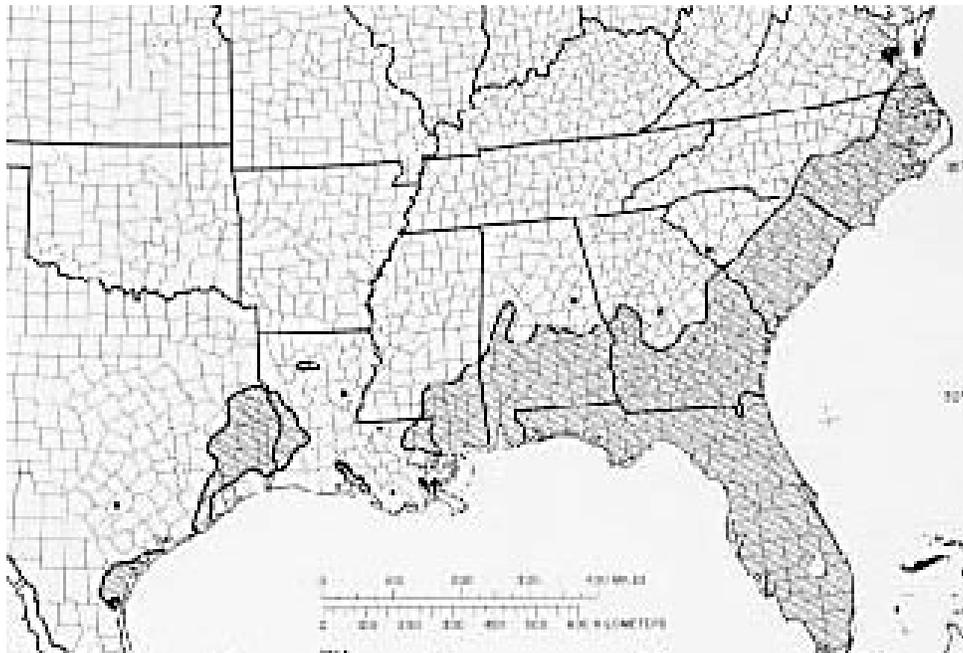
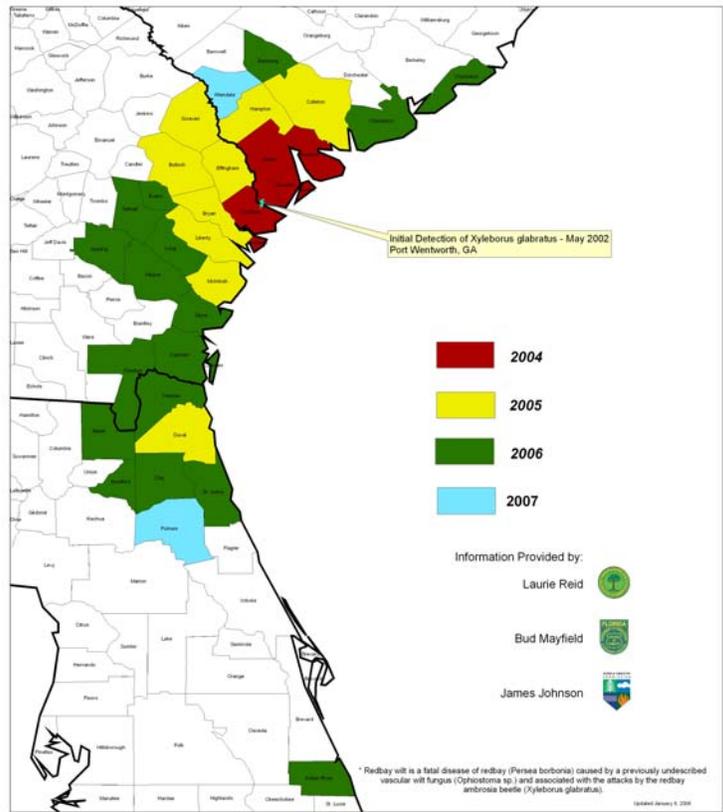
Some scientists suggest that an aggressive campaign of cutting and destroying all redbay and sassafras in infested stands might be an effective measure to eradicate isolated outbreaks of the disease.

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**Distribution of Counties with Redbay Wilt Disease\* Symptoms, by Year of Initial Detection**



Range of Redbay (*Persea borbonia*)