



Autumn Brings Changes To Mississippi Forest Health

It is October in Mississippi, and as the cooler weather arrives, our forests are beginning to transition into autumn. The Mississippi Forest Health Program is also undergoing transitions this fall. After a long and distinguished career as one of the Nation's foremost authorities on forest health, Dr. T. Evan Nebeker is retiring from his role as the Forest Entomologist for the Mississippi Forestry Commission. Evan has played a monumental role in shaping forestry practices and forest health in Mississippi, both as a research scientist at Mississippi State University and as the resident expert on forest entomology for the MFC. Additionally, Evan has been instrumental in shaping the face of Mississippi forest health management through educating hundreds of Mississippi State University students in Forest Health Protection over the last several decades. His fingerprint is indelibly stamped on the collective expertise of Mississippi Foresters. I know many of you will join me in thanking Evan for his years of service and wishing him well as he begins to enjoy his retirement.

Even though many of the forest insect pests like the southern pine beetle will be ushered into

a period of decreased activity as winter approaches, MFC's Forest Health Program will continue to be active during the coming months. First of all, I should introduce myself. My name is Dr. John Riggins, and beginning this October, I will be working with the MFC to fill the void left by Dr. Nebeker's retirement. I plan to visit each MFC District Office during the next 9 months to get to know MFC personnel and discuss new and emerging forest health threats.

I am a native of Nebraska, where I received a B.S. and M.S. degree in Biology while conducting research on native grassland insects. Later, I received my Doctorate in Entomology from the University of Arkansas. My research and training there focused on the population ecology of red oak borer, a native long-horned beetle that had been devastating Ozark National Forest. Additionally, I gained expertise in spatial technology and remote sensing as a tool for monitoring and modeling forest health problems.

I will be available to answer forest health related questions and assist in diagnosing problems as they arise. Additionally, I will visit each District Office during the next

year in order to get to know MFC personnel, identify topics and services that personnel believe to be helpful, and discuss new and emerging forest health issues in Mississippi.

In my role as the forest entomologist at Mississippi State University, I am currently conducting research on a wide variety of forest health issues, including attempting to shed light on recent low southern pine beetle numbers across the Southeast, behavior of southern pine beetle predators, risk modeling for the European woodwasp, forest health implications of Formosan termites and their potential interactions with bark beetles, and redbay ambrosia beetle and laurel wilt disease. While I believe that research plays an important role in protecting forest health, it is truly personnel on the ground, such as MFC Foresters, who serve as the first line of defense against forest health issues. Ideally, I hope that MFC foresters can use their day-to-day experiences to help identify critical issues in need of further research.

Questions about Mississippi forest health issues can be directed to Dr. Riggins using the following information:

Dr. John J. Riggins
479-422-5628
johnjriggins@gmail.com.

***For more information on the
Forest Health Program,
contact:***

Randy Chapin
District Forester, Southwest
P.O. Box 749
515 County Farm Lane NE
Brookhaven, MS 39602-0749
601-833-6621
rchapin@mfc.state.us