



The Danger of Moving Firewood

By John J. Riggins

A common theme among many of my articles and presentations is "DON'T MOVE FIREWOOD". It's such a simple concept, but so vital to our forests, both economically and ecologically. Sometimes I feel a little silly preaching this over and over again, and also frustrated that it's often the only viable option I can give the public after breaking the bad news to them that yet another non-native invasive forest pest is here or on its way. Often, non-native wood boring insect pests are well established before they are discovered. This makes control or eradication very difficult and expensive, and dramatically limits the success rates of such endeavors.

History has proved time after time that tree pests move around in firewood and other wood products. We have a prime and recent example in Mississippi. The redbay ambrosia beetle and laurel wilt disease it carries was introduced to southern Mississippi many years ahead of natural rate of spread estimates, possibly due to movement of firewood. Our neighbors in surrounding states would probably rather not have this problem wreaking havoc in their red bays, sassafras and other laurels if they already don't, and we should be mindful of this when traveling from our State.

Likewise, when returning home from your travels, please don't bring any extra pests back with you! There are numerous forest insect pests around the country that can and will happily hitchhike with you. Many of our tree species are potentially at risk from non-native invasive insects that are already established

elsewhere in the U.S. Some examples are our ash trees (emerald ash borer), pines (European woodwasp), walnuts (Thousand Cankers Disease/walnut twig beetle), and over 300 different species of hardwoods could be impacted by the Asian longhorned beetle alone.

In cases such as the emerald ash borer, Federal and State regulatory agencies institute quarantines to try and halt or slow the spread of localized infestations. I would like to ask everyone to institute "Common Sense" quarantines of their own, by not moving firewood as a general rule. What exactly do I mean by don't move firewood? I'm not saying firewood is a bad thing. It is a renewable source, and a source of cheap fuel that heats millions of homes. It is also an important convenience for many during outdoor recreation, such as camping, fishing, and hunting. What I am saying, is obtain your firewood locally when and where you need it, and use it locally or leave behind any unused portion.

I love to hunt, and take several trips out of State every year. When doing so, I can understand how it might seem more convenient or cheaper to take some firewood you already own with you, and maybe even more logical to bring back with you some unused wood you purchased at your destination. However, all of us pay in the end because of the millions of dollars of your taxpayer money spent every year in the U.S. to quarantine, eradicate, or otherwise control infestations of non-native wood boring pests that may have been aided in their spread by

movement of firewood. Many wood boring pests can persist in standing or felled trees for months or even years in some cases. Therefore, it is still inadvisable to move older, more seasoned firewood.

Lastly, I would also like to point out that shrink-wrapped firewood for sale at many convenience stores, gas stations, grocery stores, and other retail outlets isn't very safe either. There is usually no way to know where this wood originated and what might be alive in it. Some of these bundles could have come from half way across the country, or even the World, since the U.S. imports millions of dollars of firewood from around the world every year (a fact that infuriates me to no end, and is a prime example of wasteful, unsustainable business practices).

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