

Secondary Ash Problems

by Jeff Stringer

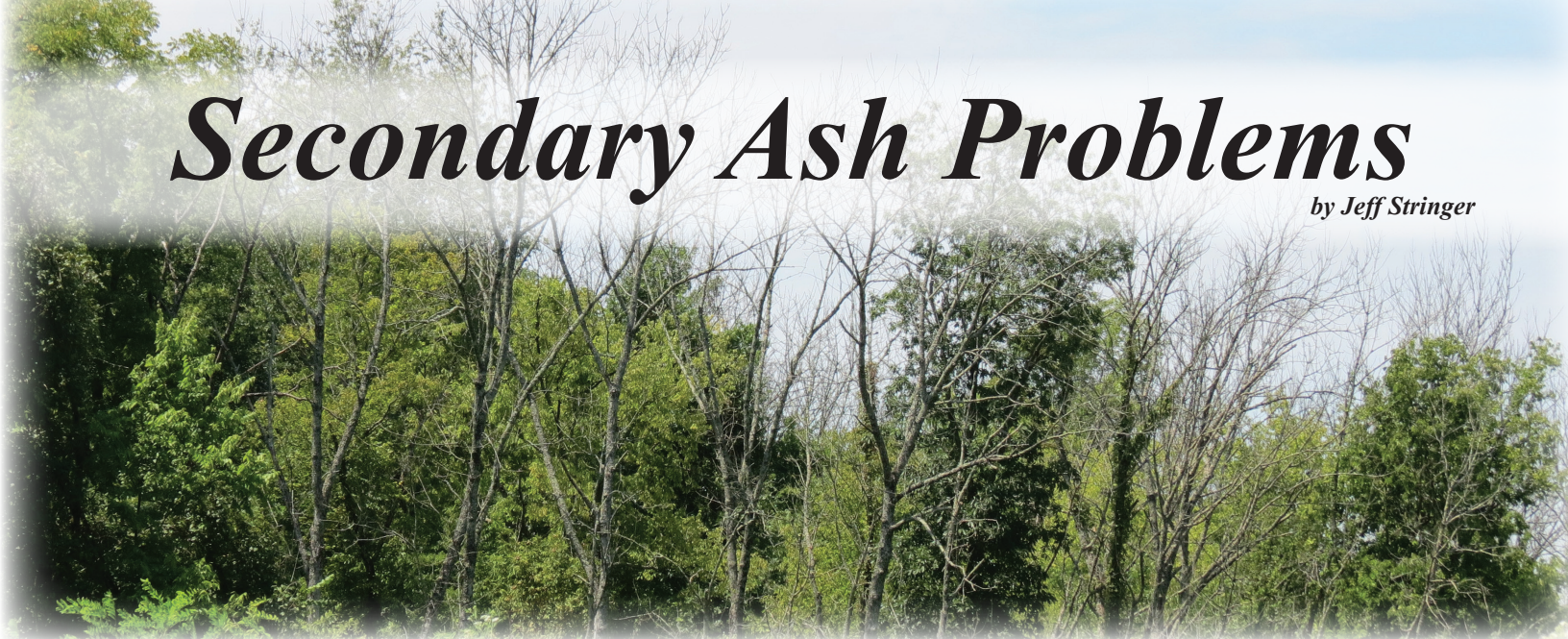


Photo courtesy: Renee' Williams

Kentucky's ash continues to die as the emerald ash borer (EAB) spreads throughout the commonwealth. The small grub type larva of the borer feeds primarily on the inner bark and typically does not damage the underlying wood. This allows trees to be harvested after they have died. However, as trees die and are left standing they are susceptible to a host of insects that can damage the wood. When EAB first hit northern Kentucky many loggers found that they could salvage trees that had seen standing dead for over a year. However, in the summer of 2016 there started to be reports of logs cut from dying or dead ash that were full of small holes. These holes went entirely through the wood and lowered the delivered log price significantly. Unaffected logs were at the time going for \$400 to \$450 per thousand board feet and those with the holes went for \$100 to \$150. This basically meant that loggers would choose not to cut the affected trees, leaving them to stand in the forest, or after cutting them down and seeing the holes leave the logs. Whether the logger left logs or trees in the woods or loaded them on the truck it ultimately results in a loss for landowners that have ash.

The culprit is a small (1/8- to 1/4-inch long) wood boring insect called an ambrosia beetle. The ambrosia beetle is native and has been long known to sawmill owners that have learned to quickly mill ash logs and not hold them on the log yard for any length of time. The ambrosia beetle attacks trees that are dying or have just died. Not all standing dead ash

are infested and these are merchantable. However, loggers are starting to take a hard look at dead or dying ash to determine if they contain the small shot-sized tunnels that indicate an ambrosia beetle infestation. Often the ambrosia beetle carries a fungus that starts to grow in the tunnels and causes the lining of the tunnel and the wood directly next to it to turn black. Figure 1 shows the small holes with the black stain. These holes, while small, are visible on standing dead or dying ash. You can often see the holes in the bark, but with EAB-killed trees it is easier to pull the bark off and look at the wood underneath. The holes may or may not show the black staining. If the ambrosia beetles are still active, you may notice a string of fine ground wood (frass) coming out of the holes.

While sawmill owners have long had problems with ambrosia beetles degrading ash logs, the occurrence of EAB-killed ash is relatively new to logging and landowners in Kentucky. As discussed previously this problem emerged last year in northern Kentucky, quite probably because there are significant amounts of dying ash in the woods resulting in a buildup of ambrosia beetles.

Landowners with ash dominated stands should be aware of this potential problem and make plans accordingly. This is especially true if you are concerned with timber value, have mature ash trees, and EAB has infested your stands or is near your property. In this case it is prudent, to contact a forester and get advisement on current ash pricing and the potential to conduct a pro-active harvest. This also indicates that if you have dead and dying ash already you need to act quickly. All of this means that landowners should be aware of the occurrence of ash in their woods and the movement of EAB.

About the Author:

Jeff Stringer, Ph.D., is an extension professor at the University of Kentucky and is responsible for continuing education and research in hardwood silviculture and forest operations. He is also an editor of the Kentucky Woodlands Magazine.

Cooperative Extension Service, Department of Forestry, University of Kentucky, 201 Thomas Poe Cooper Building, Lexington, KY 40546-0073; Phone: 859.257.5994; Fax: 859.323.1031; E-mail: stringer@uky.edu

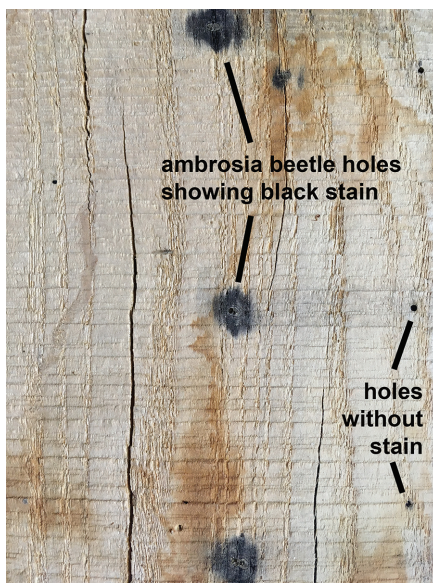


Figure 1. Ambrosia beetle damage on ash trees.

Photo courtesy: Ellen Crocker