

Dear Editor,

As you have reported previously, in 2006, the Illinois Department of Agriculture confirmed infestations of the Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) throughout Kane County and in the North Shore communities of Wilmette, Winnetka and Evanston. I am writing you this letter for two reasons: first, to inform your readers of the potentially damaging impact of this infestation on our communities and, second, to enlist your support and that of our state and federal representatives in mitigating the effects of the EAB infestation on the millions of ash trees on public and private property in our communities.

By way of background, the EAB is a destructive, small, metallic-green beetle native to Asia that only attacks ash trees. While the EAB does not pose any public health risk, it does threaten our ash tree population. Since the first EAB infestation in the United States in Michigan in 2002, more than 20 million ash trees have been lost. To date, the EAB has spread to Ohio, Indiana, Maryland and Illinois.

The insect is a serious threat to our region's biodiversity – ash trees account for 20% of the urban tree canopy in Northeastern Illinois. In total, there are over 130 million ash trees in Illinois. A loss of our ash trees will negatively impact property values, harm the environment and diminish the beauty of our communities. It will take a lifetime to replace the benefits that we enjoy from some of our oldest and most beautiful ash trees.

Addressing the presence of the EAB in Illinois will be an involved process. Currently, the only effective method for stopping the spread of the infestation is to destroy and remove all infested and healthy ash trees from an infested area. This option has been implemented in other states with confirmed infestations and may be implemented in Illinois. Such an option needs extensive planning and sufficient funding. The costs to municipalities, property owners, nursery operators and forest products industries will run in the tens of millions of dollars to combat the infestation.

Last summer, Illinois' federal representatives secured over \$4.6 million in U.S. Department of Agriculture emergency funding for Illinois to tackle the EAB outbreak. However, additional funding from both the state and federal governments will be essential in the coming years. We call on the Illinois General Assembly and all of the members of the state of Illinois' congressional delegation to assist municipalities by introducing legislation to establish a long-term management plan to cope with the onslaught of the EAB. Such a plan should include funding options to provide for the eradication and disposal of felled trees, reforestation to restore our urban canopy and research to find better ways to stop the spread of the EAB infestation.

Combating the Emerald Ash Borer isn't just a North Shore, a Cook County, or a Kane County issue; it is now Illinois's issue. Unlike Michigan and Ohio which were not prepared for the devastation of the EAB, Illinois is positioned to develop a fiscally prudent and environmentally appropriate plan to address this infestation – if we act now. On behalf of the Metropolitan Mayor's Caucus, we urge all local communities to work in partnership with our federal and state representatives to do all that we can to prevent the further spread of the EAB infestation and begin to replant and restore the beautiful tree canopy of Illinois that we all treasure.

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Sincerely,

Richard P. Reinbold  
President, Village of Richton Park  
Chair, Metropolitan Mayors Caucus Emergency Preparedness Task Force