

**FOREST HEALTH TASK FORCE (SOUTHERN GROUP OF STATE FORESTERS)  
and the  
SOUTHERN FOREST INSECT WORK CONFERENCE (SFIWC)**

**POSITION PAPER FHTF PP08-1: Restriction of Firewood Movement to Slow the Spread of Invasive Species Harmful to North American Forests**

Summary Statement:

The introduction and establishment of non-native invasive forest pests pose an overwhelming threat to native North American plant and animal species, forests, and other natural ecosystems. The movement and spread of invasive forest pests are greatly facilitated by intra- and international trade of wood-based products. While phytosanitary standards involving heat treatment or fumigation of all wood products, crates, pallets, etc. exist for internationally-traded goods, such standards are not in place for many materials traded within U.S. borders and between states. Firewood, in particular, has been largely unregulated both in the commercial sector and among private citizens, who often move firewood hundreds of miles from its source to camping destinations such as national parks and forests, state parks, or sporting events. If unregulated movement of this commodity continues, the rate and extent to which invasive wood-inhabiting pests are distributed in the U.S. will increase dramatically. The hastened spread and enhanced distribution of pests in firewood greatly increases the risk of ecological extinction of multiple tree species and untold billions of dollars in damage from invasive insects such as the emerald ash borer. These damages include costs associated with tree removals and replacement in municipalities, impacts to the tourist and recreation industry, ecosystem disruption, reduced biodiversity and loss of potential wood product markets.

Supporting/Background Information:

Background information addressing the problems posed by invasive species was provided in detail in a previous Forest Health Task Force position paper (FHTF PP07-1). This position paper will focus specifically on the problem associated with firewood acting as a major vector for the rapid spread of invasive pest species. While unrestricted firewood movement has long been a problem and may have played an important role in the spread of other now well-established, invasive pests such as gypsy moth and oak wilt – the problem became most alarming following the discovery in 2002 and rapid spread of the emerald ash borer from the Detroit, Michigan area. The emerald ash borer, a wood boring insect from Asia, has been estimated to spread on its own at the rate of about 2-10 miles per year. But, over the course of just six years, it has been found in 9 additional states. Its current known range now extends from Montreal, Canada to southeastern Missouri, a distance of almost 1,000 miles. Most new discoveries were closely linked to campgrounds or major interstate corridors, strongly suggesting artificial movement via firewood being loaded into vehicles and transported to campsites hundreds of miles away. The unrestricted movement of firewood in this manner provides a mechanism for the rapid spread of established and future invasive pests, particularly wood-inhabiting species.

Firewood for sale and distribution also presents a significant problem. Firewood is sold by businesses large and small, including Home Depot, Lowe's, Wal-Mart, convenience stores and gas stations. An informal survey of firewood for sale in Virginia by the VA Department of Agriculture found that about 2/3 of the firewood came from outside Virginia's borders, including

13 states (western states among them) and 3 countries (Canada, Honduras, and Estonia). This situation is nothing short of a nightmare from the standpoint of importing invasive pests.

A variety of websites feature information and documents on the topic of firewood movement and invasive pests, including the Nature Conservancy's 'Don't Move Firewood' site at <http://www.dontmovefirewood.org/>, the U.S. Forest Service at <http://na.fs.fed.us/firewood/>, the National Association of State Foresters at <http://www.stateforesters.org/node/78>, and a multi-agency and university collaborative website on emerald ash borer information at <http://www.stopthebeetle.info/> or <http://www.emeraldashborer.info/>. Furthermore, numerous states and national parks such as Shenandoah National Park in Virginia ([http://www.nps.gov/shen/planyourvisit/firewood\\_eab.htm](http://www.nps.gov/shen/planyourvisit/firewood_eab.htm)) have enacted firewood bans or restrictions.

It is widely recognized that most states can adequately meet their own firewood needs and demands with locally-collected wood, and long-distance transport of this material becomes increasingly expensive as energy costs rise. Therefore, it is the opinion of the Forest Health Task Force and members of the Southern Forest Insect Work Conference that the current pattern and extent of firewood movement in the U.S. is both unacceptable and unsustainable. While a small number may profit from the economics of interstate firewood movement, society at large will suffer severe costs both directly and indirectly. Even though the firewood industry in most states is probably worth tens of millions of dollars, wood-boring insects such as the Asian Longhorned Beetle and the emerald ash borer have been projected to cause hundreds of billions of dollars in damage to urban forests alone if they become established from coast to coast (Nowak et al. 2001. *Journal of Economic Entomology* 94: 116-122). Of even greater impact is the potential intangible loss of entire tree genera (i.e., maple and ash) from the nation's landscape. Once they become well established, invasive pests like the gypsy moth and emerald ash borer are capable of rapid spread. Accordingly, there is great value in slowing the spread of established non-native pests; monetary impacts are spread out over a longer time frame, and the extra time may allow for science to come up with effective biological or other control options. Every dollar spent on the Gypsy Moth Slow the Spread Program, for example, has been shown to save taxpayers at least three dollars (Leuschner et al. 1996. *Southern Journal of Applied Forestry* 20: 65-73).

#### Desired Outcome:

Strong outreach and educational campaigns are essential. Surveys have shown the public to be generally supportive of such measures if they adequately understand the reasons behind them. Import regulations based on international phytosanitary standards for the proper treatment of wood products are already in place. Regulations are urgently needed for inter-state commerce, particularly with regard to firewood. Many states have already adopted strict regulations on firewood movement within their borders. Likewise, restrictions on firewood movement by private citizens into campgrounds on state and federal lands should be established and enforced. These regulations would have considerably greater effect if adopted by all states and natural resource agencies. Enacting such measures may present some logistical difficulties and cause some restructuring within the firewood industry. However, this is a very small price to pay compared to the anticipated billions of dollars we stand to lose along with the potential elimination of major tree species from our forest ecosystems and urban forests if we continue with business as usual.