# Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

## Emerald Ash Borer

Good morning and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature. This week we'll look at ash trees and what's casting a shadow over their future.

Soon temperatures will warm and Southern Appalachia's minor-league baseball stadiums will come to life. Baseball is a relatively slow-moving game, and it's the crack of the bat that brings pause to conversations and lingering eyes back to the field.

Focused on the action, few people ever give much thought to the bat. It's just a piece of wood, honed down on a lathe, right? But it's not just any wood. Just as cedar makes great shingles, and hickory makes great firewood, white ash makes great baseball bats. White ash is hard, perfect for things like baseball bats, tool handles, and furniture.

There are numerous species of ash trees across the United States and they're often seen in parks or lining town streets. In the Southern Appalachians we have white and green ash. Unfortunately, the ash tree is falling victim to an Asian insect in a story that is becoming all too common.

The emerald ash borer is actually attractive, as insects go. The adult has a luminescent green color giving the insect its name. It lays eggs on the bark of an ash tree. When they hatch, the larvae dig into the tree and begin feeding on the living tissue found just beneath the bark, leaving small tunnels as they literally eat their way through the tree's tissue. The problem is that the feeding can be so voracious that it destroys the tree's ability to move nutrients and water up and down, and eventually girdling the tree.

Native to Russian, China, Japan, and Korea, the insect was first seen in the United States outside Detroit Michigan in 2002. It's most prevalent in Michigan, Ohio and Indiana, where it has killed more than 20 million ash trees. It has also spread to Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Maryland, and into Canada.

But why worry about something found around the Great Lakes? Because a lot of people from places like Ohio and Indiana come to the Southern Appalachians to enjoy the great outdoors, and along with camp chairs and sleeping bags, some of them pack their own firewood. While the adult insect can fly up to half a mile, what has greatly enabled its spread is the movement of infected logs, firewood, and nursery trees by people. In response, several states with outbreaks established quarantine areas, banning people from taking ash trees, logs or firewood outside of those areas.

At the other end, some areas hoping to avoid the problem have placed controls on what people can bring in. Great Smoky Mountains National Park no longer allows people to bring in firewood from the infected areas.

We have to realized that in a world where people and goods move further, faster, and more frequently than ever before, we have to be that much more diligent to prevent unwanted hitch hikers

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peeples.