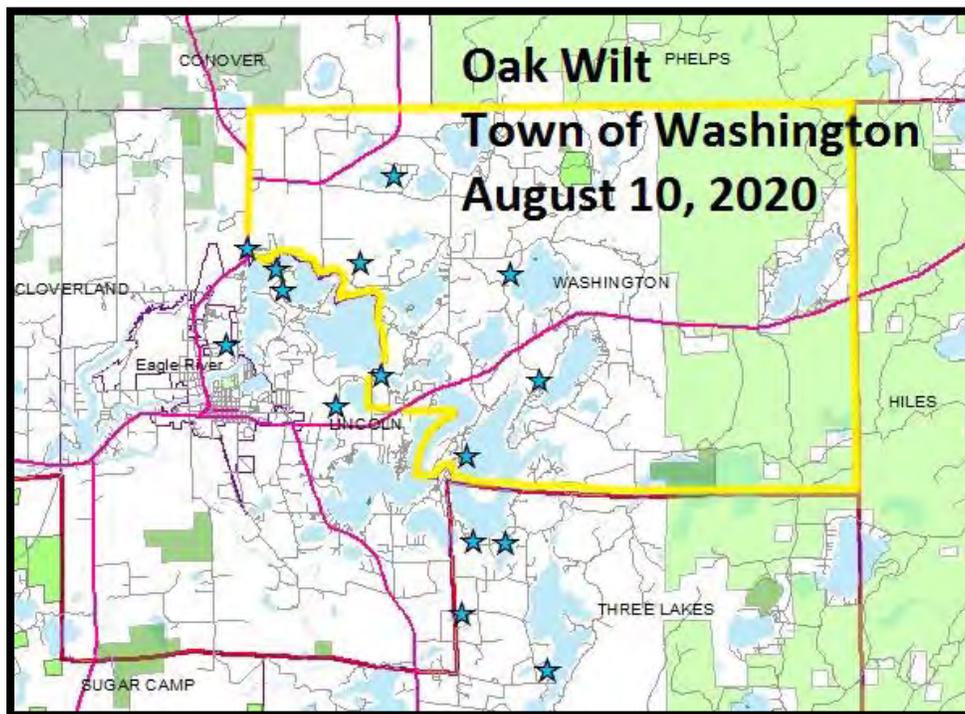


# Oak Wilt

A lethal disease of oak trees  
is spreading in our town

The Town of Washington now has seven confirmed cases of oak wilt - a devastating disease, killing trees rapidly in a single season. The seventh case was identified in August and is located on East Cranberry Lake Rd.



Oak wilt is a FATAL fungal disease that affects virtually all species of oaks. There is no known treatment for oak wilt. Once introduced through a fresh wound on an oak tree the disease will move into the roots and begin spreading underground to neighboring oaks. In this way the disease will kill more and more oaks each year if it is not treated and stopped.

The oak wilt fungus spreads in two ways:

1. by the transfer of fungal spores from diseased to healthy trees by sap feeding beetles
2. by movement of the fungus from a diseased tree to a healthy tree through root grafts.

Spores are produced on fungal mats on infected trees. Sap feeding beetles are attracted to the fruity smell of the mats. The beetles pick up fungal spores by crawling on the mats. Then they fly to healthy oaks to feed on sap flowing from fresh wounds, thus infecting new trees.

Once in a tree, the disease moves down into the root system and spreads to neighboring trees through grafted (interconnected) roots. This is the most common means of spread, and trees within 50 feet of a diseased tree can be infected. In this way, another tree will die next year, and the year after, etc., unless you kill/disrupt the connected root systems.

Any injury or wounding to an oak tree can leave it vulnerable to oak wilt whether it be storm damage, pruning or trimming. Wounding includes not only areas where bark is scraped/scuffed off, but also broken branches, and even root damage can be an entry point for oak wilt.

Oak wilt also spreads when firewood or logs from infected trees with fungal mats are moved.

Initially, single branches on infected trees wilt and die. Leaves on these branches often turn tan or dull green, starting at the tips or outer margins. Leaves may also droop, curl, or fall from the tree. Infected trees die. OAK WILT CAN KILL OAKS IN LESS THAN ONE MONTH.



The highest risk period for transmission is from April 15 – July 15. During that time, creating fresh wounds on an oak tree can attract the beetles and bring in the fungus. If you prune/wound/damage oaks during that time, immediately apply tree pruning paint within 15 minutes to protect the tree.

Treatment to stop an oak wilt pocket requires killing some healthy trees around the diseased trees and either killing the root systems using herbicides or ripping the root systems out of the ground. Just cutting trees down will not stop the fungus. Treatments can be successful, but they are costly and time consuming whereas avoiding wounding the oaks April 15 – July 15 is a favorable, easier, and cheaper option.



Removing infected oaks is often the best way to manage oak wilt. Before removing trees, be sure to disrupt root grafts between infected and other nearby oaks. This is done by severing the shared root systems between healthy and diseased trees. The most successful way of doing this is to physically cut roots with a vibratory or cable plow or trencher. The barrier must be located correctly to be successful. Be sure to destroy the wood from diseased oaks by burning or burying it. Do not bring it to the brush site.

Prune oak trees only during the dormant season when sap feeding beetles are not active. If pruning during the growing season is required (e.g., due to storm damage) immediately cover wounds with pruning paint. Carefully monitor oaks for oak wilt and remove infected trees promptly.

The Town of Washington is acting proactively. To help prevent injury to oak trees during roadside mowing, a plan has been initiated to remove low-

hanging overhead oak limbs in the right of way during the less vulnerable period. This will allow mowing in the right of way without injury to oak trees.

Oak wilt biology and control is a complex topic. If you have questions please email [Linda Williams](#) WDNR Forest Health Specialist or contact her by phone at 920-360-0665.

The USFS has an excellent brochure on how to identify, prevent and control oak wilt. To view or download [click here](#)

For more information from the DNR [click here](#)