



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE 2/1/2016**

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### **Invasive Redbay Ambrosia Beetle and Laurel Wilt Disease Confirmed in Arkansas**

**LITTLE ROCK, ARK.** – Redbay ambrosia beetle (RAB), a small dark brown-to-black, cylinder-shaped invasive beetle, and Laurel wilt disease (LWD), a fungus that blocks movement of water and nutrients within a tree, have been discovered in Arkansas sassafras trees. Findings were discovered in Bradley County by AFC Forest Health Specialist Chandler Barton and confirmed by USFS Forest Health Protection officials in Pineville, LA, and the Arkansas Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). Arkansas joins 8 other southern states with RAB/LWD findings, including: North Carolina, South Carolina, Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Texas, and Louisiana.

RAB (*Xyleborus glabratus*) was first detected in Georgia in 2002. It is a native beetle to India, Japan, Myanmar and Taiwan. The beetle transmits the causal pathogen of LWD among some plants in the Laurel family (Lauraceae), which includes sassafras trees. LWD is a vascular disease caused by the fungus *Raffaelea lauricola*.

Symptoms of LWD include wilted stems and leaves and dark streaking in the wood. LWD can spread two different ways: 1) via the beetle's natural short range dispersal; and 2) through the sale and transport of beetle-infested wood. If you notice possible RAB/LWD damage, please call AFC Forest Health Specialist Chandler Barton at (501) 297-1581 or contact your local County Extension Office.

Research shows that usual tree hosts of the RAB and Laurel Wilt pathogen are redbay, silk bay, swampbay, sassafras, and avocado trees. In Arkansas, we are concerned with the dispersal of this disease in sassafras trees. Sassafras trees are common in the Ozarks of central and NW Arkansas.

Though sassafras trees comprise a small percentage of Arkansas' total tree species (measured by Forest Inventory and Analysis data), they are common in tree stand edges and fence lines. Many sassafras trees are smaller than the minimum diameter tree picked by Forest Inventory & Analysis, which means there may be many more sassafras trees available for the disease than we know. Sassafras trees are a favorite of Arkansas pioneer culture and are known for a unique fragrance. They have historically been used as or in the making of posts, rails, boats, furniture, and tea.

Arkansas officials with the AFC, APHIS, University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service, and federal partners at the USDA are considering strategies for control efforts. If you notice possible RAB/LWD damage, please call AFC Forest Health Specialist Chandler Barton at (501) 297-1581 or contact your local County Extension Office.

The mission of the AFC is to protect Arkansas's forests, and those who enjoy them, from wildland fire and natural hazards while promoting rural and urban forest health, stewardship, development, and conservation for all generations of Arkansans.

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