

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Seeks Comments on National Firewood Task Force (NFTF) Recommendations

Many forests in the United States are under attack by nonnative, invasive species of insects and diseases that have killed or damaged millions of trees in recent years. These exotic species threaten our forests, their ecosystems, and a diverse array of consumable products and services—as well as the businesses that produce them. Firewood can serve as a key pathway for invasive forest pests such as the emerald ash borer, Asian longhorned beetle, and Sirex wood-wasp. When people move firewood, they can move these insects from one area to another, often over long distances.

Background

USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) formed the National Firewood Task Force (NFTF) in October 2009 to develop a comprehensive strategy for addressing firewood as a pathway for destructive forest pests. The task force includes representatives of the National Plant Board, National Association of State Foresters, U.S. Department of the Interior's National Park Service, USDA's Forest Service, and APHIS.

After conducting a comprehensive, 6-month analysis of the issue, the task force has released a set of recommendations for State, Tribal, and Federal officials outlining potential strategies to prevent the movement of invasive forest pests via firewood. USDA is now inviting the firewood industry to review and provide feedback on the task force's recommendations, which can be found on APHIS' Web site at: http://www.aphis.usda.gov/newsroom/hot_issues/invasive_species&firewood/index.shtml. The Web page's "News and Information" section contains a paragraph on the task force, a link to its final report, and a link for submitting comments via e-mail.

Summary of Task Force Recommendations

Task force members identified three primary areas that needed to be addressed: regulatory activities, voluntary activities, and outreach efforts. The NFTF formed subcommittees to identify key challenges and opportunities in each area and develop recommended actions. The task force reconvened to carefully study all of its subcommittee recommendations and develop its final recommendations. Some of the key ones include:

Regulatory Activities

- USDA should pursue regulations on recordkeeping and labeling for the interstate movement of firewood as soon as possible, while at the same time evaluating possible options for treatment requirements that would be developed in a separate regulation.
- States should publish intrastate movement regulations with requirements similar to the Federal regulations for labeling, recordkeeping, and treatment, as needed. Moving firewood within a 50-mile radius would be exempt from intrastate regulations, provided such movement does not violate an existing quarantine.
- State, Federal, and private parks, forests, and campgrounds should institute policies that encourage campers to use local firewood and discourage them from moving firewood out of the local area.

Voluntary Activities

- State and Federal agencies should promote the adoption of the NFTF's best management practices for firewood producers, retailers, and consumers.
- State and Federal agencies should promote the adoption of an industry-run, national certification program with labeling and recordkeeping requirements based on best management practices for producers and retailers.
- State and Federal agencies should encourage the increased availability of local or treated firewood for public and private campgrounds.

Outreach Efforts

- State and Federal agencies should convene a communications steering committee.
- An online hub of firewood outreach materials should be developed and made available to the regulatory community.

- The outreach activities identified in the report should be prioritized by the State-Federal communications committee and implemented in order of priority.
- Outreach activities should focus on supporting implementation of the voluntary and regulatory efforts identified in the report.

Call for Industry Comments

The task force recognizes the significance of these recommendations—particularly those involving regulatory action by USDA—to the firewood industry, and it encourages producers, retailers, and consumers to provide feedback. To learn about the task force, view the recommendations report, and submit comments via e-mail, visit APHIS' Web site at http://www.aphis.usda.gov/newsroom/hot_issues/invasive_species&firewood/index.shtml.

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