

Exploring knowledge of & information sources related to Emerald Ash Borer among outdoor recreationists

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Background

The Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) is a beetle native to Asia. Since its introduction to North America around 2002, it has caused the deaths of more than 10 billion ash trees. Minnesota has been on the western edge of the beetle impact.

One way to manage EAB impact is through education & information efforts. However, baseline information on what people know about EAB & how they hear about it.

The purpose of this project was to assess how much visitors know about EAB & where they have heard about it.



Method

Onsite questionnaires Focused on several items, including knowledge of EAB & knowledge sources for EAB

Timing & locale Summer 2015 at & near Fort Snelling State Park, Minnesota; a variety of weekends, days & times

Sample 401 (19% compliance near Ft Snelling State Park, 38% at Fort Snelling State park)

Results

Research question 1: How much do visitors know about EAB?

The majority of visitors self-report 'some knowledge' of EAB (55%; Fig 1). However fewer than 1 in 10 visitors have a lot of knowledge about EAB.

About 1 of 5 visitors have never heard of EAB or have heard of it, but have no knowledge of it.

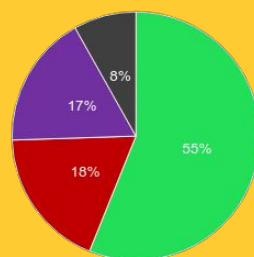


Figure 1. Percent of visitor respondents with differing levels of knowledge about Emerald Ash Borer, 2015 (n=400)

Research question 2: Where do visitors get information about EAB?

The most common EAB information source among visitors was the media (T.V., Newspaper, etc.) while the least common source was social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.; Fig 2, below).

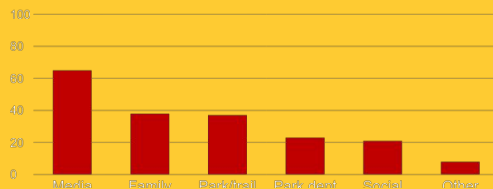


Figure 2. Percent of visitors identifying Emerald Ash Borer information sources, 2015 (n=401)

Discussion

Despite the national attention garnered to EAB in some areas, select Minnesota park visitors had limited knowledge of it. As visitor firewood and other vectors spread EAB, opportunity exists to increase visitor knowledge & awareness of EAB.

Although the majority of respondents had heard of EAB, only a small percentage self-reported great knowledge about it. The EAB knowledge gap presents an opportunity to expand and possibly improve information and education efforts. As the majority had heard of EAB through media, continuing that line of communication seems prudent. However, to capitalize on the preferred and growing use of social media for communications, attention to optimizing messages to outdoor recreationists in this way seems efficient.

The study sites where data were collected had EAB information at the trail heads and visitor center. However, only 1 in 4 visitors reported getting EAB information in this way. Therefore, assessing the effectiveness of such efforts & devising ways to increase attention to them may be necessary.

Future research can

- replicate this project to compare awareness, knowledge & information sources across time;
- expand research sites for comparisons; &
- focus on effective messaging options to prevent EAB spread.

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