



PARTNERS IN FORESTRY LANDOWNERS COOPERATIVE
6063 Baker Lake Road
Conover, WI 54519

December 2, 2019

Re: Occurrence of Oak Wilt in Vilas County

Dear Land O' Lakes Town Board (Chairman Dan Balog, Supervisor Sam Otterpohl, and Supervisor Mike Stopczynski),

We are writing to inform you of a developing threat to oak trees in Vilas County, and specifically what the town can do to help protect the abundant oaks found in the Town of Land O' Lakes. Oak is a stately tree in our area, being important to the economy as well as for its aesthetic value to residents and visitors. In addition, oaks are also a very important wildlife tree as they provide food and shelter to many wildlife species, both game and non-game.

Due to the risk of oak wilt introduction, it is important to:

avoid pruning, wounding/breaking of branches, or harvesting oaks from April 15 - July 15, which is the high risk period for oak wilt introduction. This includes roadside mowing operations that damage oaks

And, if damage to oaks occurs during this time, it is important to paint the wounds immediately (almost any paint will do).

Oak wilt is a deadly disease that was first identified in southern Wisconsin in 1944. Since that time, oak wilt has been making its way north, mainly through the transportation of oak firewood from region to region. Locally, oak wilt is spread by a beetle attracted to injured oaks primarily between April 15 and July 15. Preventing injuries to oaks during this time can protect your oaks. Oak wilt kills thousands of trees each year in Wisconsin forests, woodlots and roadsides. Oak wilt does attack and kill healthy trees. The disease is a particularly serious problem for species in the red oak group such as northern red, northern pin and black oaks. Once wilting symptoms are apparent on a red oak, the infected tree will lose most of its leaves and die within a month.

Alarmingly, this past September, a tree located in the NW corner of the Town of Conover near Co Hwy S and Rummels Road tested positive for the disease by WI DNR Forest Health Specialist, Linda Williams. This tree had been injured from road work by the Town of Conover. This discovery of the disease is in close proximity to Land O' Lakes, and poses a direct risk to all oaks within our town. Also note that pockets of oak wilt have been identified in other locations in Vilas County in recent years.

There is no cure for this disease. Once a tree is infected, the disease also spreads to nearby oak trees through interconnected root systems, creating an expanding pocket of dead oak trees. Once established in a stand, further spread is very difficult and costly to control. **The best control is to prevent its introduction in the first place by not damaging oaks from April 15 - July 15.**

What can the town do to prevent the introduction of oak wilt in Land O' Lakes? It is our recommendation that the town immediately change its road maintenance policies to delay any brushing, mowing, or pruning of trees along roadsides during the months of greatest risk of oak wilt transmission (from April 15 through July 15), when oak wilt spore-carrying beetles are most abundant. Adjusting the timing of these road maintenance practices is our best option to protect our oak trees from this disease.

All of the partners listed below support this initiative to prevent the spread of oak wilt. I sincerely hope the Land O' Lakes Town Board will take immediate action to address this new threat to the town's beautiful oak trees.

For further information on this disease, we are enclosing an updated DNR fact sheet on oak wilt in Wisconsin as well as a more recent map showing the nearby locations. As mentioned previously, there are control options once oak wilt is identified, although they can be costly and time consuming, but if you would like more information on options for control, please contact Linda Williams with the DNR (920-360-0665, Linda.Williams@Wisconsin.gov).

Feel free to contact any of us if we can be of assistance.

Sincerely,

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