



## News Release

For Immediate Release

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### **Virginia Department of Forestry Deploys Urban Forest Strike Team to Combat Invasive Insect**

(Winchester, VA) The Virginia Department of Forestry (VDOF) in partnership with USDA Forest Service, Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS), Virginia Department of Transportation, and USDA-APHIS will be deploying Urban Forest Strike Team (UFST) members for rapid data collection of an invasive pest from February 10-14. The spotted lanternfly (SLF) is an invasive plant hopper that was found in Virginia in January of 2018. SLF's preferred host is tree-of-heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*) but has a host range of more than 70 plant species, including grapes, apples, stone fruits and hops. It also has serious potential to become a nuisance in yards and urban areas.

The UFST is comprised of self-contained teams of professionally trained, certified arborists from state forestry agencies, other state and municipal agencies, and the USDA Forest Service that are specifically trained to assess risk on storm-damaged trees. Their protocol has been amended to account for trees that are affected by the introduction of SLF. These UFST were created in 2007 in response to a need for trained professionals to perform storm damage assessment of trees during major weather events. Since 2008, UFST teams have been deployed nationally to more than 40 incidents to assist communities in post-storm recovery efforts.

The UFST will identify and mark tree-of-heaven throughout the SLF infested area delineated by VDACS and USDA-APHIS. VDACS will incorporate this data into the USDA-APHIS cooperative treatment program for SLF in efforts to slow the spread of this pest to uninfested parts of Virginia and other states. The infested area includes 62 square miles, primarily in eastern Frederick County and parts of the City of Winchester, and Clarke County.

Team members will wear high-visibility vests and use handheld electronic tablets to conduct assessments of trees within the infested area. VDACS and USDA-APHIS staff have been contacting landowners to obtain permission to go onto property to conduct spotted lanternfly surveys and tree assessments within the deployment area.

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The Virginia Department of Forestry protects and develops healthy, sustainable forest resources for Virginians. With nearly 16 million acres of forestland and more than 108,000 Virginians employed in forestry, forest products and related industries, Virginia forests provide an overall economic output of more than \$21 Billion annually.

Headquartered in Charlottesville, the Agency has forestry staff members assigned to every county to provide citizen service and public safety protection across the Commonwealth, which it's been doing now for more than 100 years. VDOF is an equal opportunity provider.