

Policy and Procedure 6-3 Forest Health Monitoring

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PURPOSE

To provide guidance and instruction to agency employees regarding all aspects of DOF’s Forest Health Program.

POLICY

The primary mission of DOF’s Forest Health Program is:

- ◆ To survey and monitor Virginia for major forest pests, pathogens, non-native invasive plants and other disturbances.
- ◆ To collect and summarize these data and report them to the DOF and USDA Forest Service annually, and provide information upon request to other interested parties.
- ◆ To provide outreach and assistance to DOF foresters, private industry, forestry consultants and Virginia forest landowners regarding pest identification and general forest health conditions and concerns.

The principles of DOF’s Forest Health Program are:

- ◆ We aim to protect and improve the forest resource in Virginia.
- ◆ Our recommendations, advice and decisions should be based on unbiased scientific data.

DEFINITIONS

“Agency” and “DOF” means the Virginia Department of Forestry.

“Commonwealth” means the Commonwealth of Virginia.

“IFRIS” means Integrated Forest Resource Inventory System.

“FHGO” means Forest Health Ground Observation.

PROCEDURES

Program Priorities

- ◆ Conduct ground and aerial surveys to detect recurring and unanticipated forest health disturbances.
- ◆ Participate in Early Detection and Rapid Response (EDRR) efforts for potentially destructive emerging pests.
- ◆ The field staff is a critical part of the forest health program since they have the most frequent direct contact with landowners. Forest health training and educational opportunities will be provided for DOF field personnel to ensure they have the most up-to-date information for recommendations and identification.
- ◆ Disseminate information concerning new and emerging forest health threats to pertinent individuals and organizations through educational outreach programs and materials. Communicate research findings through non-technical means.
- ◆ Promptly respond to individuals or organizations who contact the agency with forest health-related questions or concerns.
- ◆ Collaborate with other forest health professionals and support research efforts.

Area Field Staff Support

Forest Health Ground Observations

DOF foresters and technicians are a vital part of the forest health program since they observe forest health issues in their daily work. In many cases, the forest health staff would not be aware of forest conditions if it were not for the reporting of field foresters, especially in more remote parts of the state. DOF personnel can report forest health information as Forest Health Ground Observations (FHGO) in IFRIS. Any FHGO entered into IFRIS is information that is useful to the DOF Forest Health Program. The data entered into this system is used to create maps of pest outbreaks, monitor areas of new invasions, better understand forest health issues following outbreaks, and ensure that any issues that arise in Virginia’s forests are recorded. This information is also used in annual reporting internally and to the USDA Forest Service. While all observations are helpful data, some FHGOs have been ranked as top priorities due to their threats to forest health.

Top Priorities for FHGO Reports

- ◆ Any signs of spongy moth activity
- ◆ Discovery of emerging invasive species (e.g., redbay ambrosia beetle/laurel wilt disease, Asian longhorned beetle)
- ◆ Any large-scale outbreak of seasonal pests, native or invasive (e.g., fall cankerworm, tent caterpillar, yellow poplar weevil, spongy moth)
- ◆ Any pine bark beetle activity and disturbances
- ◆ New detections of invasive plants not considered widely established in Virginia
- ◆ Invasive plants that are new to certain regions
- ◆ Significant damage from pathogens (e.g., anthracnose, fusiform rust, heterobasidion root rot)

How to Enter a FHGO

1. In IFRIS, click on 'Program Areas' and then under the dropdown menu, select "Forest Health".
2. Once in "Forest Health", click "Create FHGO" in center brown toolbar.
3. Once in "Create FHGO", scroll down to "County" in the FHGO template and then select the county in which the observation is located.
4. Next, select the date the observation was made by clicking on the calendar icon to the right of the box and selecting your date.
5. Under the category dropdown menu, select if the disturbance was caused by abiotic (non-living) or biotic (living) factors.
6. Once the category has been identified, select from drop down menus for "Class", "Type", and "Cause" to describe your observation. You will then be asked to select whether the infestation is active or inactive at the site of observation.
7. Mouse over to "Tree Species Category" and select which type of trees are being impacted by the disturbance. Next, click the dropdown menu under "Impacted Tree Species" and select the species that is impacted.
8. Now select the "Units of Measure" as either Acres or Trees and then under "Quantity" below, type the number of acres/trees impacted.
9. There is a dropdown menu beside "Follow-Up Status" where you can either select "No Follow-up" or "Follow-up requested". If you want to be contacted by the forest health staff, select "follow-up requested". If you simply want to report an observation, select "no follow-up requested". Finally, if there is any other information that you think should be reported, please type this in the "Comments" section. Once the report is complete, click the "Save" button.
10. Once you hit save, a text box will pop up telling you that you are not done with your report. Click "Go To Map" to add your coordinates.
11. Click "Create" and then "Draw" and then double click on the impacted area on the map. Once the area has been marked, click "Save". Once saved, the FHGO has been recorded.

Diagnostic Help

The DOF forest health program staff is available to help with tree pest diagnosis. When requesting this diagnostic aid, the following information is helpful and will increase the likelihood of accurate identification:

- ◆ **Good photos** – photos with causal agent (e.g., the insect causing the damage) are best, but if no causal agent is found, photos of damage may be sufficient. Multiple photos from different perspectives are useful. Try taking a close-up picture of the damage, then zoom out and take pictures of the whole plant and/or landscape. Adding an object such as a pocketknife for size comparison is always helpful.
- ◆ **Background information from landowner** – Collect as much information as possible about the history of the land, any pesticide application or management activities, significant local weather events from the last decade, and a timeline of events (when tree damage was first noticed, how quickly decline has occurred, etc.).
- ◆ **Collect a sample** – Depending on the type of damage, collect samples of foliage, bark and/or roots. When sending root samples, avoid collecting roots that are completely dead; instead get fibrous and structural roots that have some decay/discoloration and keep them in soil. If sending an insect specimen, place it in a vial with 70 percent ethyl alcohol. If this is not available, any small container (e.g., pill bottle) or plastic bag is acceptable.

Sick Tree Calls

Our agency mission and code include responding to requests for technical assistance regarding trees in privately-owned land or yards. DOF field staff should follow the expectations listed below to ensure that response to "sick tree calls" does not create an unnecessary burden on staff and does not unfairly compete with private service providers:

- ◆ Customers are encouraged to submit photos to their local area forester. Field staff should attempt to make diagnosis/recommendations based on photos and background information without conducting a site visit.

- ◆ Field staff should be encouraged to utilize forest health liaisons, forest health staff, or U&CF staff to assist with diagnosis, particularly if they are not familiar with the issue or unsure of the diagnosis.
- ◆ If a serious issue or pest is suspected, field staff may arrange a site visit to further assess or ask forest health liaisons, forest health staff, or U&CF staff to conduct a site visit. Site visits should be at a minimum and only occur when the employee is in the area for other work-related activities.
- ◆ Customers will be encouraged to utilize private arborists for further diagnosis or treatment as much as possible.
- ◆ Landowners may also submit photos and samples to the Virginia Tech Plant Disease Clinic and the Virginia Tech Insect Identification Lab. Submissions can be made through the local VCE office and landowners may be charged a fee.
- ◆ Regardless of the reason, field staff should demonstrate good customer service by promptly returning phone calls or emails from the general public.

DOF Forest Health Liaisons

Purpose

Establish liaisons between the Forest Health Program at Headquarters and the various regions and/or work areas throughout the state. These individuals will be the primary (NOT the only) point of contact between the field and the forest health program staff and will assist with forest health monitoring and outreach as needed.

Implementation

- ◆ Announce positions internally and open to all DOF foresters or technicians with knowledge/interest in forest health
- ◆ Interested applicants will secure approval from their supervisor and submit a short application noting past participation with the forest health program
- ◆ An interview process may be used to select the initial six liaisons, two per region
- ◆ Initial one-day training
- ◆ Add duties to employee's work profile (EWPs), no more than five percent of time
- ◆ Quarterly check-in conference calls and/or site visits with the forest health program manager
- ◆ Forest health program manager will communicate with the district foresters of all liaisons during annual evaluations
- ◆ Positions have a three-year term, then will be opened back up to all DOF employees

Role/Duties of the Forest Health Liaisons

- ◆ **Eyes and ears in the field** – Report the presence of pests in the region and pass along reports from landowners and other foresters. Also encourage other regional personnel to submit reports.
- ◆ **Help with trapping and surveys** – When needed, assist in placing and checking traps throughout the state (e.g., southern pine beetle pheromone trapping in the spring)
- ◆ **Attend trainings and conferences** – as time and funds allow
- ◆ **Disseminate information** – Distribute information on emerging forest health threats and treatment options to other DOF field personnel.
- ◆ **Point of contact for regional staff** – Be available as the first point of contact for regional staff with common forest health questions.

Forest Health Review

A publication will be produced annually that summarizes the major forest health disturbances and survey results of the year. This Forest Health Review may include regional reports from forest health liaisons and will be distributed internally to all DOF offices as well as externally to our stakeholders, and is available to view/download on the DOF website.

Pesticide Use

Pesticides (including herbicides) are part of an integrated pest management approach that aims to reduce pest populations to an acceptable level in a way that is practical, cost-effective and safe for the environment as well as human health. All pesticides must be evaluated and approved by the Environmental Protection Agency and contain labels that describe the uses of the material and how it must be applied. The label is a legal document and must be followed at all times.

DOF staff involved in applying pesticide, making pesticide recommendations, and/or working with herbicide contractors will obtain and maintain a Commercial Pesticide Applicators License, granted by the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS).

- ◆ DOF staff are considered Commercial Applicators Not-for-Hire, which applies to government employees who use or supervise the use of pesticides in the performance of their official duties.
- ◆ Category 2 certification for forest pest control is required for commercial applicators that will be using or supervising the use of pesticides in forests, forests nurseries and seed orchards. DOF staff may only apply pesticides on State Land unless directed otherwise by the forest management director or forest health program manager.

All DOF foresters should be licensed Commercial Applicators and it is the responsibility of the employee to obtain and maintain this certification.

- ◆ Instructions for this process can be found here: <http://www.vdacs.virginia.gov/pesticide-commercial-applicator.shtml>.
- ◆ Every new employee in a forester position will be given a pesticide manual published by Virginia Cooperative Extension. This manual should be studied in preparation for the commercial applicator certification exam, and returned to the forest health program manager after the exam has been taken.
- ◆ Re-certification credits are required to maintain a commercial applicator license and DOF has approved three annual events that offer these pesticide credits:
 - The Virginia Association of Forest Health Professionals meeting in January/February.
 - The Vegetation Management Workshop offered in the spring.
 - The Mid-Atlantic Horticulture Short Course also offered in January.
- ◆ Forest health, forest management and urban and community forestry program funds will send a limited number of DOF staff to these events each year. Other re-certification events may be approved on a case-by-case basis to be covered by regional or training budgets.

AUTHORITY

This policy and procedure is issued by the Virginia state forester.

INTERPRETATION

The forest health program manager and director of forest resource management are responsible for the interpretation of this policy and procedure.

APPROVAL

I certify that this policy and procedure is approved and ready for publication.

Lori Chamberlin

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