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NCBA Conservation Organization Alert

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Don't Trim Your Oaks This Summer!

Oak Wilt, a fungal disease that kills native oaks, has arrived in Oceana County. Once infected, trees generally die within one growing season. Although the disease has yet to be detected in North Central Beach, it poses a continuing threat endangering both individual trees and entire stands of trees in our community. Unfortunately there is no feasible treatment to stop its spread once the disease is established. **The best strategy is a preventive one aimed at protecting our Oaks from injury, including trimming and pruning, during the time of the year, March through October, when they are most vulnerable to infection.**

Trees in the **red oak family** (leaves with pointed tips) are most susceptible to the disease. This group includes the red and black oaks (*Quercus rubra* and *Quercus velutina*) that make up a large part of the native woodland bordering the beach and surrounding our cottages. To lose this resource would seriously diminish the sylvan beauty, wildlife habitat, and scenic qualities that give our community its special character.

Oak Wilt (*Ceratocystis fagacearum*) is initially transmitted by the sap-feeding Nitidulid or picnic beetle, sometimes traveling from miles away. The insects penetrate infected trees through breaches or cracks in the bark caused by the build-up of underlying fungal tissue. As the beetles feed, they come in contact with fungal spores that they then carry to healthy trees having fresh wounds left by tree trimming or wind damage. As the fungi expand at the new location, the vessels that carry water to the branches and leaves become clogged, causing the tree to wilt and die. Red oaks typically die within months, while white oaks may last several years. During this time the fungi can spread to the roots and, through the grafting of overlapping root systems, infect other trees growing within a 50-foot radius. **Several areas in West Michigan have lost large stands of oaks due to root transmission.** The same could happen to us.

Firewood is another potential source of Oak Wilt. Fungal spores are known to remain active up to a year after a tree has died and can easily be transported in recently cut wood. Cottage owners and renters alike need to be careful about the source of firewood coming into NCBA. **When buying firewood, please remember to confirm that any oak wood has been aged for at least a year.**

Longterm our best defense is to avoid having Oaks trimmed from early March through October. The best time to trim is after the first hard frost in mid-autumn. Do not rely on tree contractors for advice. Many are not aware of the threat posed by removing branches or cutting down Oaks during the warmer months. Additionally owners planning home improvements or new construction should work with their contractors to minimize damage to living trees, especially our prized Oaks, during this critical period.

Please, whatever you do, don't allow your Oaks to be trimmed this summer!

Linda McClelland and David Reynolds
Ad Hoc Environmental Committee, NCBA

For more information, see the following Michigan State websites—

- <https://treedoctor.msu.edu/oakwilt>
- http://msue.anr.msu.edu/news/stop_pruning_oak_trees_now_to_avoid_oak_wilt_1
- http://msue.anr.msu.edu/news/prune_oaks_in_winter_to_avoid_oak_wilt

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