

Louisiana Forest Health Highlights 2015

The Resource

Louisiana's forests cover 13.8 million acres, nearly half of the state's land area. The majority of the state's forested land, some 10 million acres, is in non-industrial private ownership, while approximately 603,500 acres are in national forests. Louisiana's forests are prized for their scenic beauty, supporting tourism and outdoor recreation and providing wildlife habitat throughout the state. Major forest types in Louisiana include oak-hickory, loblolly and shortleaf pine, longleaf and slash pine, mixed oak-pine, and oak-gum-cypress. Other minor types account for approximately 3% of the forest.

Forest Influences and Programs

Southern pine beetle (SPB) is Louisiana's most significant forest insect pest. However, SPB activity in the state has been insignificant in recent years, a trend that has lasted for about 16 years. No immediate, serious population buildup is in sight. Louisiana is currently offering cost-share incentives to landowners for SPB prevention practices such as thinning stands to reduce the hazard to SPB infestation.

Pine engraver beetles (Ips spp.) and black turpentine beetle remain at relatively normal levels. Because Ips infestations tend to be relatively small and scattered, they usually cannot be effectively controlled or salvaged, but their economic costs may exceed those caused by SPB.

Forest tent caterpillar caused defoliation this spring on about 362,000 acres of tupelo gum wetlands in South Louisiana. Much of the defoliated area was also affected by defoliation due to baldcypress leafroller (see Figure 1).

Baldcypress leafroller also caused defoliation on about 212,000 acres of mixed baldcypress stands in southeastern Parishes, mostly associated with forest tent caterpillar defoliated areas.

Gypsy Moth survey was conducted using 188 traps across the state and no gypsy moths were captured.

Fall Webworms are at extremely high levels this fall and we are receiving lots of calls from the public on this pest. They are particularly abundant in pecan, sweetgum, persimmon, and willows this fall.

Emerald Ash borer was first confirmed in Webster Parish in February of 2015. It has since been confirmed in Bossier and Claiborne Parishes. An official quarantine is in effect for these three parishes. We have continued to inform landowners of this pest and have distributed information through press releases and media outlets. We continue to coordinate with other agencies to monitor and implement our EAB response plan.

Laurel Wilt Disease and the Redbay Ambrosia Beetle made its introduction into Union Parish, Louisiana in September 2014. The beetle has also been confirmed in Claiborne and Lincoln Parishes. We've not received any calls outside of the known infested parishes this past year. Our foresters continue to survey for declining sassafras and redbay trees caused by laurel wilt.

A tornado touched down in Claiborne Parish and heavily damaged a hardwood bottom that was around 100-150 acres and damaged around 200-300 acres of uneven aged pine.

Mass Defoliation in Atchafalaya River Basin

In early September, the USFS notified the Louisiana Dept. of Agriculture and Forestry of a large defoliated area in the Atchafalaya River Basin. We flew the area and walked over several areas that were moderately defoliated. We believe the cause is flood related, possibly from 2011 and also the flooding that occurred earlier this year. When the Morganza locks were opened in 2011, there were several feet of water, for months, on the basin during the growing season. This flood also deposited heavy sediment on this area, which is not accustomed to these environmental conditions since the levees were put into place. Over time, the levees have caused the species composition to slowly change, thus affecting this area's ability to handle such events. We observed a very hot summer, with little rainfall, and the trees within the levees were moderately defoliated by an unknown Lepidoptera, but flushing back out with new growth when we ground checked the area. Since the defoliated area is contained within the levees, I believe that these past events have caused this area to succumb to stress more easily.

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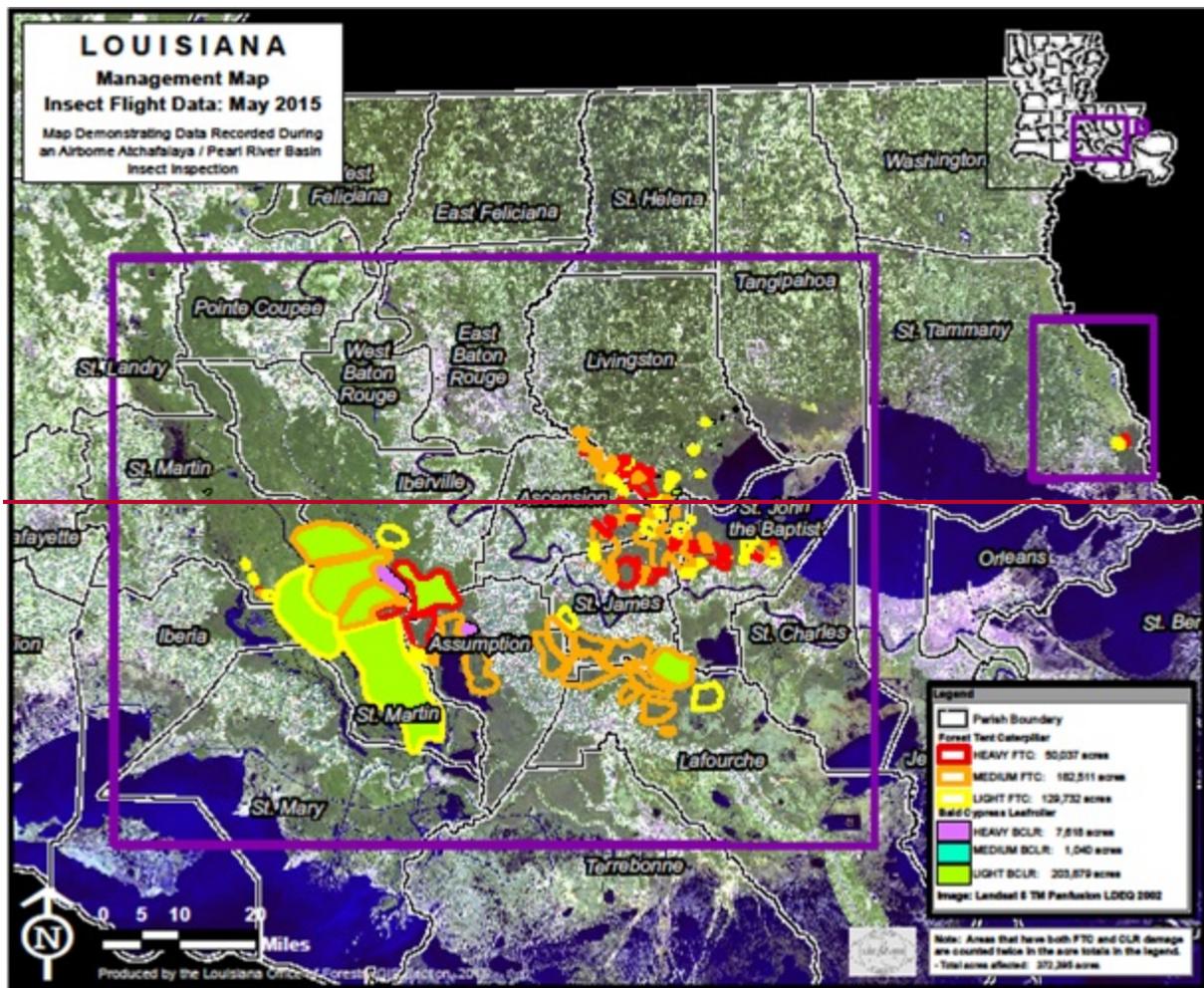


Figure 1. Balcyptus Leafroller and Forest Tent Caterpillar Defoliation in Southeast LA, Spring 2015. Damage mapped using Digital Aerial Sketchmapping System.