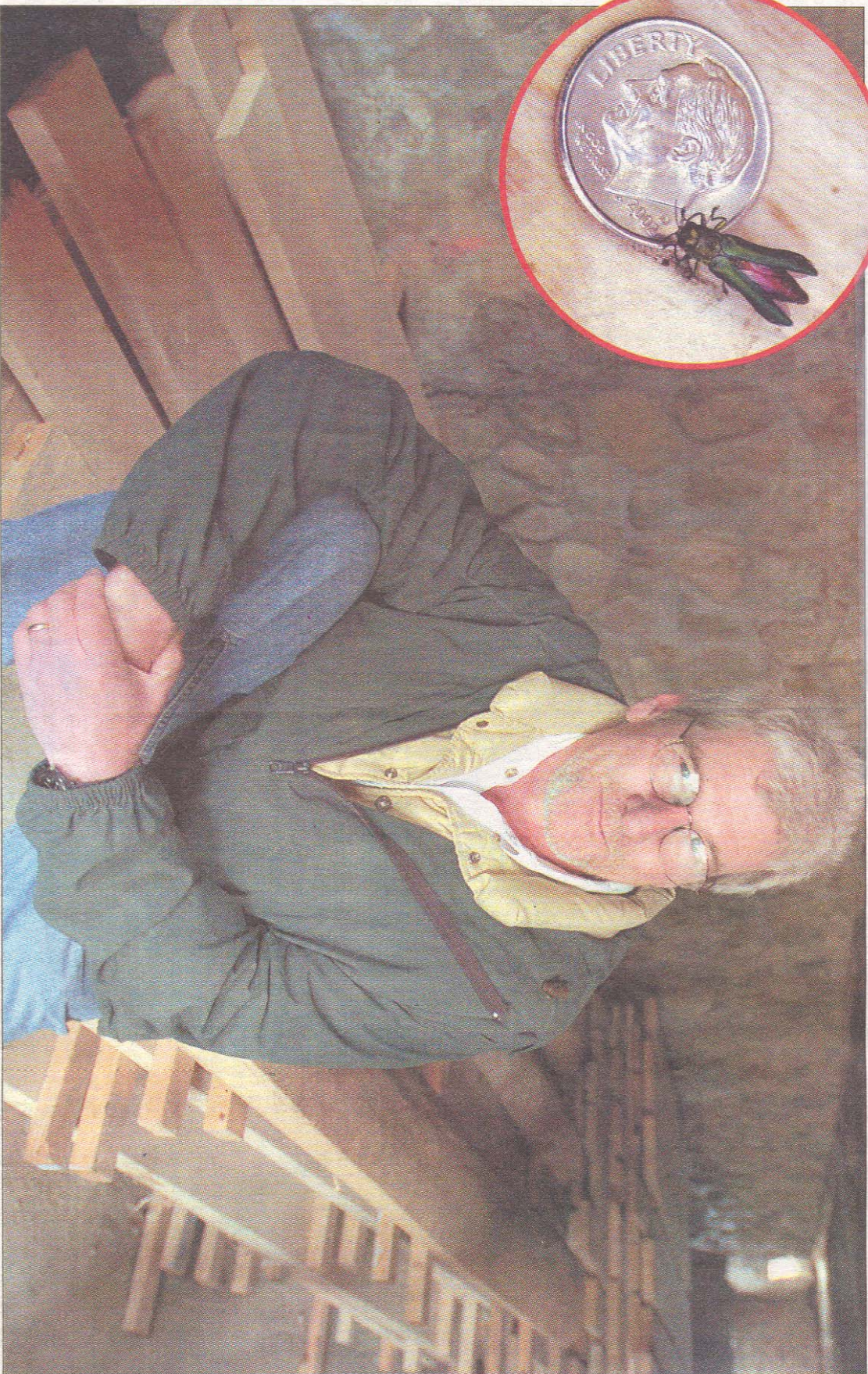


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# CONNECTION

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 1, 2006



Inset, an ash borer, an insect menacing ash trees throughout Michigan and forcing communities to cut down the trees to prevent the spread of infestation. Above, Mike Hommel, superintendent of Matthaei Botanical Gardens and Nichols Arboretum sits atop boards made from ash trees felled at the Arb. The lumber will be used to make picnic tables and to repair historic barns at Matthaei. Conservation officials are welcoming suggestions about what to do with trees cut down in urban areas.

ELIYAHU GURINKEL, THE ANN ARBOR NEWS; INSET: AMY VOIGT, THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

# Ashes to ... what?

## Conservationists seek ways to recycle diseased, nuisance trees

BY MARIANNE RZEPKA  
News Staff Reporter

Since December, the city of Ann Arbor has cut down more than 2,000 ash trees doomed by the spread of the emerald ash borer, says city forestry supervisor Stephe Slane. Those trees ended up going through a wood grinder.

The University of Michigan's Nichols Arboretum also had an ash tree problem. But the Arb staff brought in a private contractor with a portable sawmill to turn some of its ash trees into 4,000 board feet of lumber, says Jeff Plakke, natural areas specialist. That lumber is in storage at the U-M Matthaei Botanical Gardens, and there are plans to use it for repairs on the historic barns on the property or other Matthei projects.

The Southeast Michigan Resource Conservation and Development Council thinks the Arb staff has the right idea: recycle. To that end, the council intends to give out grants for smart ideas on the subject.

"Ash trees are the focus, because that's what we have so much of, but all trees are the goal," says Jessica Simons, a natural resources specialist with the group, which is organized by southeastern counties, along with area conservation and water groups.

The deadline to apply for the grants is March 31, and decisions on who should get the grants is expected to be made by the end of April, she says.

The grants include:

- One for up to \$30,000 to demonstrate how products from local trees could help the general public, such as by burning wood chips to heat schools or to turn boards into park benches.

### Wood wisdom

If you'd like to apply for a grant or want more information, check the Web site for the Southeast Michigan Resource Conservation and Development Council at [www.semircd.org/ash](http://www.semircd.org/ash) or call Jessica Simons at 734-761-6722 ext. 105.

Right, Russ Clinard of the Michigan Association of Woodturners examines a wooden bowl made from an ash tree at his Ann Arbor Township workshop. A grant from the Southeast Michigan Resource Conservation and Development Council will go toward setting up an exhibit of art and woodworked pieces made from ash trees felled in urban areas. The idea, conservationists say, is to find better uses for the felled trees than wood chips, such as Eric Burhop of Green Street Tree Care, below, is creating.

NEWS FILE PHOTOS



- One for up to \$20,000 to develop kiln-drying facilities for the trees.

- One for up to \$20,000 to set up an exhibit of fine art or woodwork pieces made from the trees.

State statistics show that up to 15 million ash trees in the state are dead or dying in southeastern Michigan because of the ash borer, an invasive beetle from Asia. The borer lays its eggs under the bark of ash trees, and its larvae eat the soft cambium layer that carries nutrients from the root to the branches of the trees.

In an attempt to stop the spreading infestation, the state has put quarantines on 21 counties, including Washtenaw County, and 31 sites in other counties, meaning no hardwood can be transported outside those boundaries. In addition, no hardwood can be taken into the Upper Peninsula from the Lower Peninsula. Violators can face fines up to \$250,000 and five years in prison.

The Resource Conservation and Development Council already has given a grant to Michigan State University to find uses for dead ash trees. Under that grant, university researchers looked into spray-on treatments for ash logs that would kill the borer so the wood could be transported out of the infected area. A spray developed from that study now is in field trials, says Simons.

MSU researchers now are looking at how to run wood-disposal operations more efficiently. The findings can help other cities and states run efficiently, even if they aren't hit by the emerald ash borer destruction.

SEE TREES, E2

### TREES FROM E1

## About \$2 billion of timber is wasted annually

"If we can find solutions here, this information can spread," says Simons. "There are a lot of cities that dispose of a lot of good wood waste."

More than 300,000 tons of ash trees went through grinders at state-run disposal sites as of last fall. To help reduce that waste, the Resource Conservation and Development Council is working on an inventory of businesses that use or produce tree products.

Last summer, survey crews went out to inventory trees in the urban areas of 13 Michigan counties, looking at the species, size, quality and condition of the trees.

Now, a questionnaire will go out to businesses in the same area to see how they use, generate and dispose of wood — whether it's pallets, packing ma-

terial, pieces from manufacturing, construction debris, telephone poles or railroad ties — as well as what the businesses do with their downed trees.

"My view is that urban trees and other wood residues are not urban wood waste, but an urban wood resource that's being wasted," says Sam Sherrill, a professor at the University of Cincinnati and author of the book "Harvesting Urban Timber."

Urban timber includes the trees that grow on all municipal property, such as parks, easements or in front of city hall.

Sherrill is looking at all kinds of hardwood trees and how all of their dead wood could be used. He estimates that 4 billion board feet of potential board lumber either ends up in landfills or is

ground into chips each year. At about 50 cents a board foot, that about \$2 billion in wasted timber annually.

Sherrill adds the nation uses about 14 billion board feet of hardwood a year.

"Let's not grind every tree in the mulcher or cut it into firewood. Let's divert the best of the ash wood to public projects, if they're public trees," says Sherrill, who is supervising the tree inventory and the business survey for the Resource Conservation and Development Council.

"My personal view is that none of this needs to go into a landfill. All of it can be used for something."

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