

Green ribbons are wrapped around trees in Lincoln to raise awareness of emerald ash borer

By Lexie Heinle / World-Herald staff writer | Posted: Wednesday, April 22, 2015 9:30 pm

LINCOLN — Lincoln Parks and Recreation employees and McPhee Elementary students have tied green ribbons around the trunks of about 750 public ash trees in Lincoln to raise awareness of the need to prepare for the emerald ash borer in Nebraska.

Lincoln Parks and Recreation Department Director Lynn Johnson said at a press conference Wednesday that the ribbons will help the public identify ash trees and recognize the deadly beetle's effects.

The ash borer, which is highly destructive to all North American ash trees, has been found in 25 states, including four bordering Nebraska. Scott Josiah, Nebraska State Forest Service director and state forester, said it is likely that the insect is already in Nebraska, but the dime-sized pest is hard to detect in the first three years after it arrives.

The ash borer is expected to cost the state dearly. Nebraska communities are estimating expenses of \$265 million to remove, dispose of and replace the state's estimated 256,000 public ash trees. Legislative Bill 461, sponsored by State Sen. Patty Pansing Brooks of Lincoln, would provide \$3 million in cost-share grants for communities affected by the insect and severe weather through the Tree Recovery Act.

"To be foresightful and to be forethoughtful, we do need to start putting some money away to be able to be ready to deal with this problem when it comes," Pansing Brooks said.

The bill, now in the Appropriations Committee, would help local forestry departments proactively remove public ash trees in poor and declining health, expand emerald ash borer detection and fund community education. Johnson estimates that his department would need \$20 million — triple Lincoln's annual community forest budget — to manage an ash borer infestation of Lincoln's 14,000 public ash trees.

"This is a significant potential impact to communities across the state," he said.

The ribbons were tied around ash trees on the Capitol grounds, in a two-block area around the Capitol, and on the Antelope Park Triangle bounded by South 27th Street, Capitol Parkway and A Street. Ash trees on both University of Nebraska-Lincoln campuses were also marked.

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