

WNBZ
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Schumer: Cuts threaten upstate forests prone to emerald ash borer

U.S. Senator Charles Schumer is urging Congress to prevent cuts to invasive species funding that could worsen Upstate New York's growing emerald ash borer problem.

The invasive beetle, which turned up in the Southern Tier in 2009, threatens more than 900 million ash trees in the state and the timber and lumber businesses they support, according to Schumer.

The House GOP budget takes \$73 million out of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service and \$354 million from agricultural research programs.

Schumer said the cuts could harm the upstate economy, since forest-based manufacturing jobs account for nearly 50,000 jobs and \$1.5 billion in payrolls. He noted that the pest has already been found in 18 counties in the Southern Tier.

"It makes no sense to tie one hand behind our back as we fight the emerald ash borer infestation, but that's exactly what these shortsighted cuts would do," Schumer said.

The emerald ash borer is indigenous to Asia. It was first discovered in Michigan in 2002. Since then it's spread to 12 states, including Southern New York, Vermont and parts of Quebec in Canada.

Researchers and environmental advocates say that unless new ways are developed to control its spread, the beetle will eventually destroy the Park's ash population.

The state Department of Environmental Conservation has been taking steps to limit its spread. It banned the transport of firewood last year and is attempting to capture the invaders in purple colored traps hung from trees along state highways.

The Adirondack Council's John Sheehan said there is hope that a native species will be identified that either competes with or kills the emerald ash borer.

"The ideal solution would be to find a native insect as an antidote to this problem," he said. He noted that there is a wasp species in the state that will attack it, but said it remains unclear whether it will become an effective management tool.

Without federal funding however, Sheehan said none of these possible breakthroughs are likely to succeed.

Ash species account for only about 5 percent of the trees in the Adirondack Park, far less than other parts of the state. Since the green bug only targets ash trees, damage would be limited to that species.

But Sheehan said it would be an ecological catastrophe to lose the ash tree in the Adirondack forest. He also noted that some manufacturers in the park, like the Adirondack Bat Company, rely on ash from other parts of the state to sustain their businesses.

In addition, federal funding could also help prevent an even more destructive beetle. The Asian long horned beetle has not yet reached New York, but Sheehan said it has the potential to decimate some the park's most valuable hardwoods, including the sugar maple.

-George Earl, 6-10-11