



February 4, 2021

Representative Rick Hansen
Chair, House Environment and Natural Resources Finance and Policy Committee
227 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Representative Mike Sundin
Chair, House Agriculture Finance and Policy Committee
417 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Hansen and Chair Sundin:

The Partnership on Waste and Energy (“Partnership”) is a Joint Powers Board of Hennepin, Ramsey and Washington Counties. Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) is now identified in 26 counties and continues to spread. Where infestation occurs, counties and cities face a growing burden to remove and replace trees and properly manage the ever-increasing volume of wood waste that is resulting from the EAB infestation.

The Partnership has worked closely with state agencies who have a role in combating EAB, and support most recommendations in the EQB 2019 Emerald Ash Borer in Minnesota Report. The Report speaks to a multi-faceted response, but most of the steps to be taken are rolling out slowly or are on hold for want of resources.

We urge the state to ramp up funding community efforts to remove and replace ash trees in our community forests and urban canopy. More aggressive management will slow the spread of the EAB.

We are particularly concerned about the growing volume of wood waste from infested ash trees. Counties are the local government entity charged with the responsibility to manage solid waste, and Minnesota lacks a plan to manage large quantities of EAB-related wood waste.

One current use that has been employed to manage this waste is the preparation of wood fuel for the St. Paul District Energy facilities. This use has provided an outlet for a substantial amount of material, but may be a short-term option. St. Paul District Energy is coming to the end of its Power Purchase Agreement with Xcel Energy. An extension of the PPA would buy time to develop other uses and markets for ash wood, but this cannot solve the entire problem. From an environmental and health perspective, open burning and landfilling are not appropriate.

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The 2019 EQB report clearly states that a “large influx of ash wood will saturate a currently limited wood-use market that has little room to expand.” Current users are not in a position to handle the rapidly growing volume of affected ash wood. It is clear from the report that there is no planful “system” in place to manage large quantities of EAB-related wood waste. Unlike the extensive public sector planning that has occurred for other waste streams in the state, there are no comparable policies and plans for wood waste.

The lessons from the Dutch elm disease epidemic decades ago are clear – without a planned approach to dealing with ash wood waste the result will be open burning and landfilling with negative health and environmental consequences.

This is an issue that has urgency, has many stakeholders, affects multiple levels of government (state, county, municipal) and for which there is no system in place to address the large and growing volume of material in a short period of time. There appears to be agreement that EAB-related wood waste should be managed responsibly, treating it as a resource with value, and that there is a need for a collaborative plan to move in that direction. What is also needed is a determination of state financial support for this direction, and that any solutions for wood waste management be considered as part of a broader waste management system.

We would request that the Legislature approve funding to support a more aggressive management of our state’s ash wood and work with us to find appropriate methods for managing this waste, as together we face this problem.

Thank you for your consideration for our EAB concerns.

Sincerely,



Commissioner Victoria Reinhardt, Ramsey County
Chair, Partnership on Waste and Energy

cc: Nancy Conley, Committee Administrator
Peter Strohmeier, Committee Administrator
Commissioner Debbie Goettel, Hennepin County
Commissioner Fran Miron, Washington County