

connections

A Newsletter Dedicated to Ice Age Trail Hosts

Your Forest's Health: Oak Wilt

As an Ice Age Trail host, you likely own forested land and may be curious what kind of challenges and diseases face the trees in your forests. Oak wilt is a disease that affects many trees in Wisconsin and may be relevant for the oak trees in your area.

Every year, Wisconsin's oak trees face a pervasive and ever-spreading invasive disease: oak wilt. Oak wilt occurs throughout the state but is less common in the northernmost counties. All along the 1,200 miles of the Ice Age Trail, oak trees are susceptible to the disease.

Starting at leaf-out and into August, you can recognize oak wilt by the rapid wilting of leaves; this wilting begins at the top of the tree and spreads down. Oaks killed in the previous year often display spore pads that rupture the bark, which can then be observed through swelling and a vertical crack underneath the surface of the tree. This makes it difficult to see any superficial evidence of the disease except for wilted leaves.

The spread of oak wilt occurs both above and below the ground. Above ground, the disease is commonly spread by insect activity or the movement of firewood. Certain sap-feeding beetles can

carry spores to healthy trees during the growing season. Below ground, oak trees (particularly red oaks) have root systems that graft together, allowing the movement of the fungus to easily move from tree to tree. Oak wilt can wipe out entire forests of oak trees, leaving barren skeletons where vibrant, healthy trees used to thrive.

The best way to manage oak wilt is to prevent the disease from spreading. To help oak trees retain their armor – their bark – avoid wounding oaks from April to August. If possible, do not prune or cut during this time, and be careful when using a weed whacker or lawn mower. Being cautious when performing trail maintenance or building is key.

This article was adapted with permission from an article by Bill Cook, Michigan State University Extension. You can read the original article, published April 14, 2014, at msue.anr.msu.edu/news/oak_wilt_disease.

Join us at the IATA Annual Conference April 23-26!

Please consider attending our Annual Conference, taking place this year in Wisconsin Dells. For more information, visit iceagetrail.org/2015-annual-conference.



A red oak leaf infected with oak wilt.

Easement Monitoring

Annual easement monitoring will take place in April and May for Ice Age Trail hosts who hold easements on their property in the following counties: **Polk, Marathon, Taylor, Chippewa, Sauk, Columbia, Waukesha.**

Please contact Kevin at kevin@iceagetrail.org if you have questions or would like to meet on the property during the site visit.



Our Mission: To create, support, and protect a thousand-mile footpath tracing Ice Age formations across Wisconsin — the Ice Age National Scenic Trail

2110 Main Street
Cross Plains, WI 53528

Featured Trail Host



Groves Easement: 175 acres

County: Columbia

Segment Name: Groves-Pertzborn Segment

Total Property Owned by Trail Host: 230 acres

Property Name: Fern Glen

The Ice Age Trail existed on the Groves' property for many years before Frank Groves and his family decided to donate a conservation easement on their farm in 2009. From the donation the family was able to gain an income tax advantage, and the easement will help them retain the farm for the next generation.

Not only was more than half a mile of Ice Age Trail protected on the Groves' property, but we have used this easement to leverage protection for another 261 acres and 4+ miles of Trail around the state.

A commemorative plaque on a custom-built bench reads, "Generations of outdoor enthusiasts are grateful to the Groves family for their generosity and foresight." How true.

The Groves property in southern Columbia County.