



Highlights of [GAO-06-353](#), a report to the Chairman, Committee on Resources, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Invasive forest pests have seriously harmed our environment and imposed significant costs upon our economy. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is the lead agency for responding to forest pests. This report evaluates the federal response to three invasive forest pests—the Asian longhorned beetle, the emerald ash borer, and the pathogen *Phytophthora ramorum* (*P. ramorum*).

Specifically, GAO describes (1) the status of efforts to eradicate these species, (2) the factors affecting the success of those efforts, (3) overall forest health monitoring programs, (4) coordination and communication of the three pest response efforts, and (5) USDA's use of panels of scientific experts to aid in the response efforts.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretary of Agriculture (1) expand efforts to monitor forest health conditions to include urban areas, particularly those deemed high risk for potential infestations; (2) regularly update and publish management plans for pests that include status information and funding needs; and (3) implement written procedures that broadly define when and how to operate science panels for specific pests. USDA did not directly disagree with GAO's recommendations, but took issue with GAO's presentation of some of the findings that supported the recommendations. GAO continues to believe that its findings fully support the three recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-353.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Robin Nazzaro at (202) 512-3841, or nazzaror@gao.gov.

INVASIVE FOREST PESTS

Lessons Learned from Three Recent Infestations May Aid in Managing Future Efforts

What GAO Found

On the basis of the available evidence, it appears that the Asian longhorned beetle will be eradicated in the three states that have infestations, although funding reductions have extended the likely completion date. In contrast, the emerald ash borer and *P. ramorum*—the pathogen that causes Sudden Oak Death—are likely to continue to infest and damage forest ecosystems in the Midwest and West Coast, respectively, despite efforts to control them.

The success of the federal responses to these infestations has been affected by several factors. First, the unique biological characteristics of each species greatly influenced the ability to effectively control them. Second, several years elapsed between each pest's arrival and its discovery, thereby giving it time to become established in the environment before control programs began. This situation cannot be fixed retroactively, but it could be avoided in the future with better monitoring. Third, quarantines have helped contain the spread of the pests, but implementation and enforcement have been difficult. Fourth, the only available method for eradicating these pests is to destroy the infested trees and plants—a costly and sometimes impractical approach. Lastly, despite budgeting over \$420 million on these pests, USDA program managers told GAO that funding has not been sufficient to fully implement their programs.

USDA conducts a range of forest health monitoring programs, including a pilot project in some urban areas; however, these programs do not provide for comprehensive monitoring in urban forests or other locations considered at high risk from pest invasions. Monitoring in such areas is important because they are common destination points for internationally traded cargo that is a frequent pathway for pests.

Federal and nonfederal stakeholders involved in these efforts told GAO that appropriate mechanisms to coordinate response efforts are generally in place, although many noted that better coordination among agriculture and natural resource agencies would have helped produce a more effective initial response. In addition, USDA's *P. ramorum* control plan does not fully comply with a congressional requirement that it communicate future funding needs. Furthermore, USDA has not updated plans for the Asian longhorned beetle or emerald ash borer to communicate to decision makers or the public how it will modify its response efforts in light of fiscal years 2005 and 2006 funding reductions, and how those reductions have affected the long-term prospects for managing the pests.

Panels of scientific experts have assisted USDA with each of the three pest responses, although GAO and stakeholders have some concerns about how they were formed or operated. For example, some stakeholders believed that the agency should have convened the panels more frequently and made the panel process more open to interested parties. GAO found that USDA does not have written procedures for forming and using science panels.