

## URGENT CALL TO ACTION – The Last Chance to Save Our Ash!



Treated ash trees in full, fall color on a city parkway in the 33<sup>rd</sup> Ward

By **John Friedmann, NRC President**

**We need your help *now* to save thousands of mature ash trees on the city's parkways.** All ash trees in Chicago are vulnerable to the emerald ash borer (EAB) infestation that has been decimating ash species throughout the United States for over a decade. In 2013, Chicago's Bureau of Forestry embarked on a successful program to treat and preserve the 45,000 ash trees still lining city streets. **However, it quietly ended that program last year. Without this continued treatment, all ash trees will become infested by the EAB and die within the next few years.**

Ash originally comprised 17% of the trees located on city parkways and even today make up approximately 10% of Chicago's tree canopy. The five wards comprising the NRC service area are estimated to still have over 5,000 ash trees gracing their parkways. The loss of another 45,000 mature trees citywide will contribute to higher surface temperatures and more rain runoff onto sidewalks and streets – causing more and worse basement flooding and combined sewer overflows into area rivers. Parkways with intermittent empty gaps lower property values and make neighborhoods look uncared for.

Two months ago, one of our community organizations, the **Ravenswood Manor Improvement Association (RMIA)**, began a successful program of community awareness to address this problem. Association members tied a green ribbon around all parkway ash with a card providing information and requesting assistance. Through this initiative, RMIA raised sufficient donations to privately treat the 99 ash within their boundaries. This treatment program will protect their trees for the next three years. At that time the treatment will have to be repeated unless the city can be persuaded to reinstate its own program. We congratulate RMIA on this great environmental initiative.



Tagged ash trees in the Ravenswood Manor community

Next month we will be seeking volunteers from our other community organizations, as well as support from local schools, universities, religious institutions and businesses to expand community awareness throughout the NRC service area. We will be identifying the endangered ash trees with ribbon and cards to alert homeowners and neighbors about the need for immediate action and also engaging our elected officials for their support.

Our primary goal is to create sufficient public outcry to persuade the city to reinstate its treatment program for the 45,000 ash trees remaining on city parkways. Optimal treatment time is late spring after these trees have leafed out.

Simultaneously, we will work to secure ward menu money or other public funds for the project. And to supplement any shortfall in available funding, we'll support our community organizations and other partners to locally fundraise and provide non-governmental alternatives to protect our tree canopy.

The city program was cut ostensibly to save money in a tough budget environment. However, using Forestry's own budget numbers, it costs \$20 per year per tree for city crews to inoculate an average size ash and protect it from the EAB. If an ash is not treated it will become infested and die within a few years. Removal of a mature ash and replacement with a young sapling costs over \$1,000 per tree. With treatment averaging just 2% of the cost of removal and replacement, treating 45,000 trees is a cost-saving initiative that will generate approximately \$42.3 Million in savings for the city over the next three years. AND, we'll still have the mature trees around with all their related benefits. For financial and environmental reasons, it makes no sense to terminate the ash treatment program and let these magnificent trees die.

Instead, **we propose that the city adopt a managed program of ash tree replacement** – maintaining the current inventory with regular treatment while culling 5% of the trees each year and replacing them with other species. The least healthy ash trees would be removed first, but no more than two would be cut down at the same time from any given block unless they were hazardous. After 20 years the ash population would essentially be replaced, the new saplings would have time to grow into mature trees, the all-important canopy would be maintained, and the city’s annual budget outlay would be much more manageable. We further propose that during and even after this program, homeowners be given the option of privately maintaining a favored ash in front of their homes in perpetuity.

We do need your help to roll out this initiative. Even if you don’t have an ash directly in front of your property, all neighbors benefit from preserving the tree canopy. To identify parkway ash trees, look for circular metallic tags (see photo below) on the street side that were placed there during treatment by Forestry over the last few years.



Chicago Bureau of Forestry tags used to identify treated ash trees

We will be strategizing the implementation of our plan at the next NRC Environmental Committee meeting on March 24, 2020 at 7:00 PM. Please join us that night, volunteer your services or contact us for more information. We are requesting that all community organizations send a representative to the meeting.

The window for saving our ash is closing. **The time to act is now. Please help us.**

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