

# AN INTRODUCTION TO FOREST HEALTH

## What does forest health refer to?

Forest health covers many topics including entomology (insects), pathology (diseases), botany (plants) and forestry. Those working in forest health are tasked with protecting more than 16 million acres of forest in Wisconsin (more than 46% of total land area). However, everyone can help keep Wisconsin forests healthy:

- Learn how to identify the signs and symptoms of problem insects, diseases and invasive plants.
- Investigate how to manage pest species
- Help prevent new pests from establishing by not moving firewood
- Practice sustainable forestry

## Wisconsin's forests are important for many reasons:

- Ecological - supply wildlife habitat, clean air and water and reduce erosion.
- Economic – provide billions of dollars of wood products and support the tourism industry.
- Recreational/social – offer numerous recreation opportunities including camping, hiking, wildlife viewing, hunting, and motorized sports to name a few. Forests improve our quality of life in urban and rural areas. They are also an important place for cultural and spiritual needs and values for many people.



*Photo: Aerial view of the forest at Devil's Lake State Park.*

## What species are pests?

Although most plants, insects and diseases are important components of Wisconsin's forests some species cause occasional or permanent damage. Native insects like forest tent caterpillars can defoliate entire forests but in most cases healthy forests are able to quickly recover. Invasive species like the emerald ash borer on the other hand have the potential to destroy every ash tree in Wisconsin leading to negative consequences like flooding and establishment of invasive plants. The goal of forest health workers is to determine what species are problems and what we can do to prevent or manage the damage. Maintaining healthy forests is the ultimate goal!



*Photo: Forest tent caterpillars are not invasive species, contrary to what many people believe.*

## For more information about forest health:

- Wisconsin DNR: go to <http://dnr.wi.gov/> and search keyword 'forest health'
- Forest Service: go to <http://www.fs.fed.us/> and search keyword 'forest health'