



ASH LISTENING SESSIONS
FINAL REPORT – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PREPARED BY DOVETAIL PARTNERS, INC.

PREPARED FOR THE
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ASH LISTENING SESSIONS

Executive Summary

Background

The exotic emerald ash borer (EAB) was first discovered in the United States in Detroit, Michigan, in 2002. Today, the EAB has been confirmed in 13 states and is responsible for the death of over 30 million ash trees in southeastern Michigan alone.

In 2009 EAB was confirmed in Vernon county, Wisconsin, across the Mississippi river from Houston county, Minnesota. In May, 2009, EAB was confirmed in St. Paul, and in early 2010 in a Minneapolis neighborhood. To date, three Minnesota counties are under an EAB quarantine: Houston, Ramsey and Hennepin.

Minnesota has the third highest population of ash species in the nation (forest land) with ash also comprising a significant proportion of the urban forest resource. The use of market forces to encourage and facilitate utilization is an important strategy for reducing the cost and increasing the effectiveness of forest and urban stand preparation and sanitation work necessitated by the arrival of EAB. Consequently, the Minnesota DNR is developing a *Utilization and Marketing Plan* to minimize negative ecological and economic impacts. In order to gather input and set priorities for inclusion in the plan, two ash listening sessions were held.

Listening Sessions

Ash listening sessions were held in spring 2010 in Grand Rapids (May 4) and Eagan (May 6). Participants at the sessions—30 in Grand Rapids and 35 in Eagan—represented a diverse group of stakeholders including representatives from communities, landowner groups, wood industries (large and small), urban tree service firms, non-governmental organizations, universities, public agencies, and others. All stakeholders (or their organizations) were selected by members of a planning committee.

Following short overview presentations on EAB, stakeholders at both listening sessions were divided into small groups of 4-6. Each small group brainstormed a series of nine questions related to ash marketing and utilization, and selected 2-3 high priority items for each question. These prioritized items were then shared with, and ranked via an anonymous vote by, the large group. Since the small groups were instructed to “work at their own pace”, all groups did not respond to all nine questions although “key questions” were addressed by all groups.

Results for Key Questions

There were five key questions (out of a total of nine) and the small groups were asked to address these questions before proceeding with the others. The following is a summary of results for the key questions.

Question 1. What are the biggest **challenges or hurdles** to existing, and potentially expanded, ash markets and utilization?

Three highly ranked priority items were identified at both the Grand Rapids and Eagan sessions. These priorities are summarized as:

1. Lack of information and education on ash markets including access to existing markets (currently limited) and developing markets; utilization options; and wood properties.
2. Lack of information and education on the ash resource including lack of inventory data (especially on private property in communities).
3. Quarantines especially simplifying transport and regulatory aspects.

Question 2. What are your **recommendations or ideas** for expanding markets for ash wood?

The top three priorities addressed by both the Grand Rapids and Eagan groups are summarized as follows:

1. Engage local government units, architects, designers, procurement folks and others to “buy local” by promoting the use of Minnesota wood (including lumber products as well as mulch, biomass, etc.).
2. Develop niche markets for ash including biomass opportunities that promote green energy and community district heating.
3. Develop cooperative (combined) processing operations (including debarking), cooperative sales efforts, and cooperative community and industry relationships.

Question 3. What are your **information and training needs** (“gaps”) regarding EAB/utilization and marketing of ash?

Both the Grand Rapids and Eagan sessions placed a high priority on the following areas:

1. Need to develop promotional and public relations tools to keep EAB ash markets and utilization in front of the public.
2. Need to develop a one-stop informational shop for landowners and other interested parties including specifics on where and when to get help, strategies, action steps, and so forth.

Question 4. What **concerns** (if any) do you have about greater utilization of ash?

Both the Grand Rapids and Eagan stakeholders expressed similar concerns that can be summarized as follows (unranked by the large group):

1. Concern about the “boom and bust” nature of ash including the impact on other species and infrastructure.
2. Concern about not only “how” to stimulate a bio-based energy market but “where” to site biomass energy facilities including (with) community acceptance.

Question 9. Any **other thoughts** we have not covered that you would like to share on ash utilization and marketing challenges, needs, concerns, strategies or opportunities?

Three priority items (unranked by the large group) made the short list at both listening session locations:

1. Need to better develop and expand the DNR/MDA firewood initiative/certification program.
2. Need to develop cooperatives, collection yards (logs and other wood articles) and storage sites (lumber for ex.).
3. Need reasonable regulations and the capacity to enforce quarantines.

Other Results

Other “second tier” questions were addressed to varying degrees by stakeholders and included topics on quarantines/compliance agreements; regulatory structures, ordinances and incentives; groups and organizations to support an ash utilization and marketing effort; and hurdles to establishing partnerships between communities. Unranked priority items include:

1. Regulators need to consider market (utilization) implications when establishing quarantine boundaries (Grand Rapids and Eagan priority).
2. Promote ash products less likely to spread EAB (i.e., chips, pellets, kiln dried lumber) (Grand Rapids priority).
3. There is a need to clarify, promote and educate stakeholders on the differences between firewood movement restrictions and quarantines (Eagan priority).
4. The I-694 corridor in the Twin Cities between Hennepin and Ramsey counties should be included in (or exempted from) the current EAB quarantine (Eagan priority).
5. Provide education followed by incentives to favor ash in local projects (incentives could include tax free mill sites, tax reductions for delivering ash to local collections yards, right-of-first refusal on ash wood to local producers, etc.) (Grand Rapids and Eagan priority)
6. Focus on cooperative approaches including collection yards and regional resource centers (Grand Rapids and Eagan priority).
7. Develop a networking directory for communities to use in establishing community and industry linkages (Grand Rapids priority).

Recommendations

Based on stakeholder input and ranking of priorities (summarized above), and consistent “themes” or topics that surfaced at one or both listening session locations (documented in the full report), the following recommendations are offered (*in no particular order*) to facilitate greater ash utilization in Minnesota. These recommendations address the “low hanging fruit” nature of the issue and the timeliness (potential success rate) of achievement. In some cases, much of the background work has already been completed (either in Minnesota or in another state).

Recommendation #1 – Develop a Twin Cities-based wood processor directory that can be used to connect communities (ash managers) to wood users or industry (ash processors).

Recommendation #2 – Develop an ash materials networking directory for communities in northern Minnesota (“out state”) for use in establishing community and industry linkages.

Recommendation #3 - Develop a handbook or guide on wood properties of ash.

Recommendation #4 – Collect and disseminate information from other states such as Michigan on past experiences, lessons learned, and examples as to what they have done regarding utilization and marketing of ash.

Recommendation #5 – Develop promotional and public relations tools to keep EAB ash markets and utilization in front of the public.

Recommendation #6 – Promote the use of Minnesota wood (ash) by engaging with local government units, architects, designers, procurement folks and others to “buy local”.

Recommendation # 7 – Include the Anoka county portion of the I-694 corridor in the current Hennepin and Ramsey county quarantines.

Recommendation #8 – Evaluate the cultural significance of increased ash utilization among Tribal entities.

This report was prepared by
DOVETAIL PARTNERS, INC.

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