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Forest Conservation Essay

November 5, 2024

*Kentucky's Most Wanted*

On the side of the road, in the depths of the forest, or even in the safety of your backyard, danger is waiting for its chance to strike. Many forests and woodlands across Kentucky are struggling to survive because their murderers are running rampant and lurking to attack their next easy victim. I am Kaitlin Rulon and on this episode of *Kentucky's Most Wanted*, we will work to see if we can stop these nonnative invasive species before they kill again.

*Lycorma delicatula* or better known as the Spotted Lanternfly—SLF is Kentucky's newest invasive threat. While disguising itself as an innocent butterfly, this angel of death is piercing and sucking the life out of our trees. She flutters at dusk into unsuspecting woodlands or forests, feasting on native plants in large groups. Oh, yes, they're pack hunters. They hide in the canopies of our precious trees by day and come out at night to do their worst. The University of Kentucky reports, "there are over 70 potential hosts for SLF. Feeding preferences change as they age, with immature nymphs feeding on a broader range of plants while adults will preferentially feed on the *tree of life*" (<https://entomology.ca.uky.edu>). That's right. These voracious killers haunt the night like Dracula himself, and leave their nymphs behind to continue to devastate our trees. Well, this dangerous southern sweetheart feeds off of our trees and believes they are going to get away with it. but we have you in our sights and we will not stop until we hunt you down.

Next up on our top three countdown is a plant that enjoys crowding out and poisoning its victims. In 1898, honeysuckle was imported to New York to be an oriental plant and to help with soil erosion. but it escaped from its gardens and headed for the soils of Kentucky. Susan Harkins

asserts “most of us have seen *Lonicera* while hiking or even around town. They’re everywhere” (Harkins). Susan Harkins’ account shows just how invasive this pest really is. But it’s not only a nuisance, it impedes reforestation efforts and prevents the regeneration of native species. This tricky adapter can alter its needs to meet just about any environmental climate– from Florida’s summers to Kentucky’s coldest winter, it just keeps on growing. *Lonicera* is one of the first to sprout its leaves in the spring and just about the last to drop them. With its ability to increase its growing season, its prolific capabilities multiply. And if that is not enough, *Lonicera* even releases a chemical into the soil that kills off any vegetation that may attempt to reclaim its place in native soil. But watch out *Lonicera* because the Kentucky Department of Forestry is working to find you, dig you out, or burn you down.

Topping out our top three *Kentucky’s Most Wanted* countdown is none other than the *Agrilus planipennis*, also known as the Emerald Ash Borer. This beautiful killer was a stowaway on cargo coming from Asia. The main victims– Ash Trees. After becoming infested, these trees lose the life providing canopy and then shortly after, the tree loses its life. These beetles don’t stop there though. They can even travel by firewood that is moved from an infested tree to a different unaffected area, and is allowing the beetles to spread and kill more Ash trees. Erica Hupp brings to light that, “ash trees provide food and habitat for wildlife and are widely planted in urban environments. They are used commercially to make a variety of products such as tool handles, baseball bats, flooring, cabinets, and furniture.” Obviously, Ash trees are important to the environment and our economy. The chairs you sit in, the bed you sleep in, the guy that plays baseball– all use the Ash wood as a resource and the Emerald Ash Borer threatens the existence of these goods. Watch out because they could be impacting a home near yours.

These invasive, serial killers are reducing the diversification of trees and impacting the overall health of our cherished woodlands, so how can we stop them? You can call the office of the State Entomologist at 859-257-5838 to report an invasive species. Together, we can stop these species before our native vegetation declines beyond repair. I'm Kaitlin Rulon and thank you for listening to *Kentucky's Most Wanted*.

Works Cited

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