

# Perspectives on Emerald Ash Borer's Arrival from Zena Forest

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Ben Deumling is the President of Zena Forest Products, a Salem, Oregon based multi-generational family business that works to save, restore and promote the endangered hardwood forests of Oregon's Willamette Valley. The forest that Ben manages encompasses several ecosystems, including Oregon ash dominated riparian forest. He knew that the arrival of the emerald ash borer was coming and worked with state officials to plan for the moment we are now in. They stopped planting ash in the Zena forest about five years ago, and have increased production of ash wood products as trees have died or become available through forest management projects in the region. Ben notes that ash wood is easy to work with because trees grow much straighter than other hardwoods, and it dries relatively quickly, but pointed out due to riparian protection measures, the supply has been limited up to this point.

Ben's concerns surrounding the arrival of the emerald ash borer are layered. He understands that eventually Oregon Ash will disappear from the landscape, and wonders what will take their place. These trees make up a major component of Willamette Valley riparian forests, and occupy a niche that no single other species can replace. He wonders how local restoration efforts will address this conundrum, and what will happen to the infested trees. How will stream temperatures be affected? What are the secondary and tertiary effects that will manifest from this loss?

He also sees an opportunity. Given the marketability of ash wood and the

capacity of his and other sawmills to turn these trees into valuable forest products, he is clear eyed about the possibilities of the situation. However, he's not jumping in just yet. Prior to the documentation of the emerald ash borer in Forest Grove, Zena had been working with a private landowner to purchase ash logs from a restoration project in Gaston, OR. The Forest Grove infestation was discovered just before the trees were to be cut down and transported to the Zena mill. Because the source of the wood was so close to Forest Grove, Ben was unwilling to have them trucked to his Salem sawmill, for fear of transporting EAB. The landowner is highly motivated and plans to strip the bark and cambium from the logs and then arrange to have them transported for processing at Zena's mill, a process that significantly reduces the likelihood of the pests hitching a ride and infesting the ash in Zena Forest, but is expensive and is unlikely to be implemented at a large scale.

Ben commended the state's efforts to prepare and now implement the Emerald Ash Borer Readiness and Response Plan, and also acknowledged that what we need now is time. The ash borer will spread throughout Oregon Ash's range and riparian ecosystem will be forever changed. If we can slow the spread by implementing and following quarantine orders, we might buy ourselves enough time to collaborate on solutions that can preserve ecological integrity in the face of this dramatic shift.

## LISTEN

### Emergence Magazine Podcast on the Loss of Ash, Assisted Migration and More

In a series titled "They Carry us With Them," the team at Emergence Magazine's podcast looked at many facets of tree migration, and in the [feature story](#), Chelsea Steinauer-Scudder details how the arrival of emerald ash borer has affected Mik'maq basket makers, and presents deep questions about how losses like this affect culture and ecology. This audio essay offers some solidarity with the loss that so many in Oregon are grappling with following EAB's arrival.

*Oregon ash seed clusters.*  
Photo Credit: Dr. Richard Sniezko

