

2015 Employee Award of Distinction Human Relations – Robert Lawrence

Many non-native, invasive insects and diseases pose serious threats to Missouri's forest resources and economy. Agencies in Missouri have cooperated in the past to respond to threats posed by individual invasive pests like gypsy moth, emerald ash borer and thousand cankers disease (TCD). As the potential for spread and establishment of these and other invasive forest pests continues, a more comprehensive approach to response planning and implementation was needed.

In recognition of this need Rob was a founding member of the Missouri Invasive Forest Invasive Forest Pest Council. The Council's purpose is to coordinate efforts to monitor and respond to invasive forests pests. Principle members are from the Missouri Departments of Conservation, Agriculture, and Natural Resources with support from the University of Missouri Extension, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and other stakeholders.

In the last 18 months Rob has guided this group to collaboratively address the impact invasive insects will have on our forests. The efforts of this group have resulted in the development of the *Missouri Invasive Forest Pest Plan* which provides an overarching framework for a consistent, coordinated response between agencies within Missouri to future invasive forest pest threats.

The plan defines roles and responsibilities of cooperating agencies and outlines actions that are common to responses for most damaging invasive pests, specifically: outreach, risk reduction, monitoring, response to detection and management of established populations. In addition, action plans for individual pest species, that are complementary to the Missouri Invasive Forest Pest Plan, will be developed as dynamic documents that define additional response activities specific to those pests. The plan for addressing TCD was developed in 2014 along with the overarching plan. TCD is a threat to all of the black walnut in the state and is fatal to the tree.

Rob clearly understands that assuring the health of Missouri's forest, fish, and wildlife resources (Missouri Conservation Department (MDC) mission) requires the public to understand the threat and what actions they can take to address the problem. To that end public comment on the draft plan was gathered by placing it on the MDC website for 30 days in the fall of 2014. The comments received were carefully considered and changes made. The plan is currently advancing through channels for signature by the leadership in the three principles state agencies.

In 2014 Rob was a champion to raise public awareness. Through his leadership the Council forged a stronger partnership with the University of Missouri Extension resulting in the redesign and improvement of a Tree Pests web page hosted by the University. This web page is a collaborative effort of state and federal agencies to keep citizens informed of the latest invasive insect and disease threats to Missouri's trees <http://extension.missouri.edu/treepests/emeraldashborer.aspx> .

Rob's efforts are an outstanding example of an employee striving to create a better public image of state government by working to improve relations with sister agencies and by working collaboratively with public and private stakeholders.