



EASTERN PLANT BOARD

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Kathleen Atkinson
Area Director and Regional Forester
US Forest Service
Northeastern Area and Eastern Region
626 E. Wisconsin Ave.
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Dear Ms. Atkinson,

The Eastern Plant Board believes that there is a need for participation by US Forest Service Forest Health Protection personnel at its annual meeting. Many of the states in the Eastern Plant Board have cooperative programs and policies that are related to Forest Health Protection program goals, and there is a great need for communication from and to US Forest Service personnel at this annual regional meeting. Over the last two years, the Forest Service has agreed to participate in the Eastern Plant Board Meetings only to have been notified shortly before the meeting that their travel was not approved. This negatively impacted meeting attendees and left meeting organizers struggling to find reasonable substitutes for missed talks. Lack of participation at this meeting can lead to a breakdown of communication between agencies and is a detriment to collaborations, current and future.

The goal of the Eastern Plant Board meeting is to address regional plant pest problems and regulations, and to identify challenges and opportunities to cooperate across agencies. The meeting coordinates regional representatives from the plant protection regulatory agencies from twelve state Departments of Agriculture in the northeastern area, as well as regional and national representatives from APHIS PPQ and Customs and Border Protection (CBP). Communication with the US Forest Service at these meetings in the past has enhanced collaborations and communication between various state and federal agencies, strengthening pest response programs in the region. Between 2011 and 2015, US Forest Service participation enhanced this meeting, with personnel delivering presentations on US Forest Health program updates (2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015), as well as technical talks on pests of shared concern in the northeast like emerald ash borer and white pine blister rust (2014, 2015). Past participation at the

Eastern Plant Board meeting has been valuable in the northeastern area where there is significant opportunity for collaboration.

This year's Eastern Plant Board meeting had presentations on oak wilt, scale on conifers, hemlock woolly adelgid, emerald ash borer, Asian longhorned beetle, and European gypsy moth, all pests of concern to the US Forest Service, and where there is joint responsibility by state and federal regulatory agencies and the Forest Service. These areas of shared responsibility provide opportunities for collaboration and enhanced response. However, as there was no US Forest Service participation at this meeting, discussion following presentations occurred without any Forest Service input or representation. Additionally, because this year's meeting had an emphasis on pathogens, a US Forest Service pathologist was invited to present about risks of pathogens to northeastern forests, as well as opportunities to improve detections of pathogens moved in trade at the ports. Her travel was not approved; the outline of the talk was presented in her absence. As such, attendees got an incomplete presentation of the US Forest Service's role and concerns, resulting connections between relevant agencies were not made, and potential future collaborative efforts were reduced - at a detriment to those who manage northeastern forests for industry and recreation.

Communication is essential between cooperators including federal, state, and tribal governments. Participation by the Forest Service with the Eastern Plant Board membership is critical - both for the members of the Eastern Plant Board and plant regulatory agencies, but also for US Forest Service programs. As such, the current US Forest Service practice of not sending representatives to the Eastern Plant Board meeting does not promote shared forest health protection and forest pest regulatory interests.

The Eastern Plant Board respectfully requests that: 1) the US Forest Service approve personnel to attend Regional and National Plant Board meetings; 2) the US Forest Service honor and respect invitations to present at Regional and National Plant Board meetings and approve travel for invited presenters; and 3) the US Forest Service approve attendance in a transparent and timely manner so that meeting organizers can successfully build the meeting agenda. The Eastern Plant Board also respectfully requests that the US Forest Service provide guidance as to the criteria used to determine a meeting's relevance to the US Forest Service's mission. Knowing these criteria will assist meeting organizers to effectively communicate the need for US Forest Service participation at this meeting.

Sincerely,



Dana Rhodes, President, Eastern Plant Board

Distribution:

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