

# FOREST STEWARDSHIP BRIEFINGS

Timber ◇ Wildlife ◇ Water ◇ Soil ◇ Best Management Practices ◇ Forest Health ◇ Recreation ◇ Aesthetics

## LAUREL OAK WILT ON THE RISE

*from Agrilife Today article dated April 27, 2022*

*For more information:*

- [bit.ly/TXLaurelWilt](https://bit.ly/TXLaurelWilt)

Texas A&M Agrilife is warning that laurel wilt, a disease that affects several species across the state of Texas, is becoming more of a problem. This disease was first found in Texas in 2013 after it was introduced in Georgia in 2004.

David Appel, a plant pathologist with the Texas A&M Agrilife Extension Service, explained that “the laurel wilt pathogen, *Raffaelea lauricola*, affects any trees in the family Lauraceae.” This is the plant family that includes trees like red bay, sassafras, avocados, and swamp bay. The disease has not been the subject of much attention in the past, but Appel’s attention was drawn to its presence in the Kingwood area of northeastern Harris County, where the pathogen was killing trees.

Laurel wilt is expected to continue spreading throughout the red bay population of East Texas and down the Gulf Coast., where the species is a popular shade tree. So far, the disease has been identified in 14 counties in East Texas, and it has a significant impact on residential neighborhoods and urban landscapes. Appel expects that many trees will die to this pathogen due to its explosive nature, and he predicts that there will be a good amount of spread this summer. Such a spread will require attention if the spread of the disease is to be slowed. Appel is working with other experts, including personnel from the Texas

A&M Forest Service, to develop an educational program on laurel wilt. This program will be held in mid-June in the Houston area. It will be two days, with the first day focusing on arborists and tree care professionals and the second day focused on homeowners.

The spread of laurel wilt is facilitated by insects and roots of infected trees. One insect uniquely suited to assist the spread is the red bay ambrosia beetle, which was introduced at the same time as the pathogen. The beetles carrying the disease will spread to healthy trees and bore tunnels in which to lay their eggs. When the young hatch, they feed on the pathogen as it grows in their tunnels, and then the beetles move on to infect more healthy trees in the cycle.

The initial symptoms of a dying tree are the yellowing and wilting of leaves on random branches. Eventually, these symptoms will spread to larger branches, resulting in a large amount of the canopy displaying splotchy patterns of yellow and brown. When it comes to treating laurel wilt, proper diagnosis of the disease is the crucial first step in planning. Keep a close eye on trees, especially if they are of sentimental value or particularly close to your home. Before having trees removed, it is best to consult an International Society of Arboriculture certified arborist to confirm it is laurel wilt.

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

*Riparian Buffers and Stream Banks*

*Texas Land Trends Survey*

*First Local Hazard Mitigation Grant*

*Carbon Credit Contracts*

*Wildfire Recovery Efforts*

## RIPARIAN BUFFERS AND STREAM BANKS

*from Stormwater: The Journal for Surface Water and Erosion Control Professionals website article dated January 5, 2022*

*For more information:*

- [bit.ly/3qqO4uc](https://bit.ly/3qqO4uc)

A new study in the Journal of Environmental Quality suggests that riparian buffer areas commonly used for nutrient control in agriculture could be installed and maintained in more places than previously thought. Through expanding the areas where these riparian buffers are maintained, farmers can help protect their local waterways from the nutrients that can move off of their properties. Notably, vegetated riparian buffers are already widely utilized in the forest industry to prevent the movement of sediment off of logging tracts and into waterways. This type of widespread placement could be justified in the agricultural industry based on this new study.

Under the current guidelines, there are limited areas where riparian buffers should be installed. This is because of the concern that redirected water flow in these barriers would weaken the stream banks. Eroded streambanks can fall into the stream, damaging water quality and the landscape. To prevent this, riparian buffers are typically limited to shorter banks and kept off of tall banks.

The new study, conducted by Loulou Dickey and a team of researchers out of Iowa State University, tested the assumptions about stream bank height

and its relation to the risk of eroding banks along with the effects of newly-added riparian buffers on stream bank stability.

The study found that most stream banks were appropriately stable after the addition of a new riparian buffer. In fact, the new water flow through the soil endangered stream bank stability only about three percent of the time. These riparian buffer failures were in scenarios where the soil was too sandy to hold together or the riparian buffer was less than six feet in width. Both of these situations are uncommon.

The most reliable predictor of a failing stream bank was the previous occurrence of erosion and instability. Dickey explained that stream banks that are already failing will likely continue to do so, despite the addition of a riparian buffer. Tall banks did not indicate likely failure, but steep banks showed higher erosion rates.

Ultimately, this study shows that riparian buffers can effectively prevent nutrients from reaching waterways in more areas than previously thought, and the agriculture industry can play a larger role in protecting local waterways.

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## TEXAS LAND TRENDS SURVEY

Back in February, the Texas A&M Natural Resources Institute (NRI) released the 2022 Landowner Survey under the Texas Land Trends program. There is now a new survey for the institute to gather data on the daily use and management of Texas's water resources. This survey is called the Texas Water Survey. NRI is looking for water users, providers, community

leaders, and other water professionals to weigh in on their water-related activities in order to better inform water professionals on the ways water is being used by the people of Texas. These water resources include groundwater, rivers, streams, lakes, and drinking water. The survey link is provided in the adjacent list of websites.

*from Agrilife Today website by Texas A&M*

*For more information:*

- [bit.ly/ATwater](https://bit.ly/ATwater)
- <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/P2HZ2XQ>

## FIRST LOCAL HAZARD MITIGATION GRANT

The City of Galveston has been awarded the first Local Hazard Mitigation Plans Program (LHMPP) grant. On March 16th, Commissioner George P. Bush announced that the Texas General Land Office (GLO) approved a \$70,000 grant to the City of Galveston for project development and implementation on hazard mitigation projects.

This grant is the first awarded from the LHMPP, which has \$25 million in grants available to assist eligible entities in developing or updating FEMA-approved local hazard mitigation plans. Commissioner Bush explained that “this program will help at-risk communities identify vulnerabilities and mitigate against future disaster damage to better protect Texas residents.”

The GLO teamed up with the Texas Division of Emergency Management (TDEM) and the Texas Water Devel-

opment Board (TWDB) to encourage local entities affected by specific disasters to apply to GLO to access the \$25 million in grants available to assist in developing or updating FEMA-approved local hazard mitigation plans. These plans benefit local communities by recognizing the risks and hazards that exist, identifying ways to reduce or eliminate those risks, and qualifying the communities for additional grant-funded programs.

The LHMPP is one of many programs designed to protect communities hit by Hurricane Harvey and severe flooding in 2015 and 2016. To qualify for this program, communities must be in federally declared counties or ZIP codes from Hurricane Harvey, the 2015 floods, or the 2016 floods. Communities with FEMA-approved local hazard mitigation plans are eligible for additional grant funding through FEMA-funded grant programs.

*from The Texas General Land Office press release dated March 16, 2022*

*For more information:*

- [bit.ly/GALVGRANT](https://bit.ly/GALVGRANT)

## CARBON CREDIT CONTRACTS

Carbon credit has been a notable buzz word for quite some time now, but it is becoming a more concrete idea among Texas agricultural producers. Landowners and producers across the agricultural spectrum have been reaching out to the Texas A&M Agrilife Extension Service for advice on carbon credit contracts.

For context, a carbon credit is equivalent to one metric ton of carbon dioxide emission reductions from an unregulated source. Although carbon offsets cannot be required by law, they are becoming important to companies and individuals who are looking to mitigate their carbon footprint in a time where environmental conserva-

tion is becoming more valuable to consumers. As a result, landowners are being contacted about potentially signing a carbon credit contract on their property, with the reduction in carbon emissions on the property being purchased from the landowner by the company or individual to offset their activities.

Agrilife Extension agricultural law specialist, Tiffany Lashmet, noted that “the most important advice [she] can offer,” on the subject of carbon credit contracts for landowners, “is to carefully read the entire contract. Never rely on verbal representations.” Lashmet discusses these contracts in detail in her Texas Agriculture Law Blog, linked at the side of the page.

*from Morning Ag Clips website article dated February 1, 2022*

*For more information:*

- [bit.ly/CarbCred](https://bit.ly/CarbCred)
- <https://agrilife.org/texasaglaw/>

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## WILDFIRE RECOVERY EFFORTS

As a result of the raging wildfires back in March, many landowners are faced with a long road ahead in the recovery from fire on their property. Hay fields were destroyed, fences were reduced to char, and livestock lost their food sources. Texas A&M Agrilife Extension Service partnered with Red Chain Feeds, Texas Animal Health Commission, Texas Department of Agriculture, and Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association to combine their efforts and provide relief supplies to those affected by the historic and devastating wildfires. They are asking for donations of fencing supplies, feed, and hay to help relieve affected areas of the state. AgriLife Extension Director, Monty Dozier, explained that “[any] donations will go directly to those who need them as soon as possible... Texans are known for their generosity and deep values of Texas agriculture during times of need. This is certainly a situation where our neighbors and friends are needing assistance after losing some if not all of their livelihoods.” If you cannot donate the supplies listed above, a relief fund has also been established through the STAR Fund Disaster Assistance under the Texas Department of Agriculture.



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