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Scientists set fungus-filled traps for invasive emerald ash borer in Bedford

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WATCH: Federal scientists are trying to prevent catastrophe in Bedford forests by infecting the Emerald Ash Borer. As Elizabeth McSheffrey reports, they're using an experimental fungus-filled trap that isn't available on the market yet.

Federal scientists are trying to bait the invasive emerald ash borer with fungus-filled traps set in the branches of Bedford trees.

A team from Natural Resources Canada hoisted the spiral-shaped snares into the woods by the Bedford Outdoor Pool on Wednesday, in the hopes that over the next week or so, emerald ash borers will fly through them in search of food and mates.

Each trap contains an open-ended contamination chamber whose fungus is deadly to the insect in a matter of days.

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“The beetle flies in the trap, falls down on there, escapes from the trap, mates with other emerald ash borers, and transmits the disease, hopefully, in that way,” explained Fredericton-based forest research scientist Jon Sweeney.

> “Every female that gets infected, those are fewer eggs that can be laid on a tree,” he said.

The emerald ash borer – or EAB, as it’s known to entomologists – is an invasive species from eastern Asia that wreaks havoc on ash trees. It can kill 99 per cent of ash trees in a forest in less than 10 years, and has killed millions of them across Canada and the United States.

It’s been detected in certain parts of Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec and New Brunswick, but didn’t turn up in Nova Scotia until fall of 2018. Earlier this year, 10 trees were removed from DeWolf Park in Bedford due to an infestation.

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Efforts to eliminate them from North America have been unsuccessful, and Mark Ardis of GDG Environment said the traps in Bedford are experimental.

“Right now, on the market to control the emerald ash borer, there isn’t anything that controls the adults,” he explained. “There’s larvicides that you can inject your trees with, but this is the first product (for adults) that will eventually be on the market.”

GDG Environment produces the traps and is conducting research on their effectiveness with the federal government.

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Thirty have been set in the trees behind the pool next to plain sticky traps, which will catch the bugs so scientists can dissect them and learn more about the fungus’ effects.

A control site containing only 15 sticky traps has also been created behind the Bedford Police Station, so the team can compare the population control in treated and untreated forests.

Researchers will return weekly to check on the progress of each test site in an experiment that’s expected to last between four and six weeks. They’ve added signs to the trees asking the public not to touch the traps, and Sweeney encourages anyone who sees an EAB-damaged ash tree to contact the local Canadian Food Inspection Agency office.

Residents have also been advised not to transport firewood from one place to another, to avoid risk of helping the insects spread.