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Dufferin County calls on property owners to help fight Oak Wilt

Written By **Paula Brown**

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The County of Dufferin is calling on residents to help maintain the health of local forests by assisting in preventing the spread of an exotic invasive disease that kills oak trees.

The County of Dufferin issued a press release on Friday (March 1) asking residents to help prevent the spread of an invasive tree disease called Oak Wilk by refraining from cutting, pruning or damaging oak trees in the Dufferin County Forest from April 1 to July 31.

Oak Wilt, is an exotic invasive disease that kills all species of oak, preferring those in the Red Oak group.

The County said it is inevitable for the disease to spread as it is already present in Ontario's communities.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency, the leading agency dealing with exotic invasive species, has confirmed three cases of Oak Wilt in Ontario as of summer 2023: Niagara Falls, Springwater Township, and Niagara-on-the-Lake.

The County said Oak Wilt spreads mostly through three means, including direct human activity such as firewood or wood movement, sap beetles, and root grafts.

The Dufferin County Forest is a 1,066-hectare (2,626-acre) multi-tract forested area owned and managed by the County. It serves important functions in terms of erosion and water control, natural heritage protection, biodiversity, wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, and support of the rural economy through timber production and employment opportunities.

The Red Oak represented a significant component of several stands of the Dufferin County Forest portfolio, particularly in the Main Tract. Many of these stands are also part of the Oak Ridges South Slope Area of Natural and Scientific Interest, which is recognized in part for its oak component.

A stand is considered a contagious area where there are trees that are relatively homogenous or share similar characteristics.

The Dufferin County Forest celebrated its 75th anniversary in 2005, and as part of the celebration, Red Oak was declared the official tree of Dufferin County.