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Pest Risk Assessment for Importation of Solid Wood Packing Materials into the United States

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Abstract

A wide variety of exotic tree pests can readily be transported into the United States on untreated wooden pallets, crating, bracing, and other solid wood packing materials (SWPM). Recent introductions of forest pests associated with importation of SWPM demonstrate that current United States import regulations are inadequate to exclude such pests. Nearly all (97 percent) of the quarantine-significant tree pests found by port inspectors are associated with SWPM. In spite of current bark-free import requirements, about 9 percent of maritime shipments contain bark, which provides habitat for numerous organisms. A pest risk assessment was conducted for the SWPM pathway to document risks associated with the pathway under current import requirements. The document includes a description of SWPM pathway characteristics and assessments of potential for pest entry and establishment. The potential consequences of pest introduction, including expected environmental and economic impacts, were also assessed. The pest risk assessment team selected 19 representative species or groups of insects and fungi of potential concern for detailed assessments to represent an array of geographical origins, host types, and pest habitats. Pest risk potentials were described in relation to current regulations and practices and without regard to potential mitigation measures or proposed regulations (i.e., baseline assessment). Experts evaluated seven risk elements for each potential pest to obtain an overall qualitative ranking (high, moderate, or low pest risk potential). Four of these elements related to likelihood of introduction: (1) pest with host or commodity at origin potential, (2) entry potential, (3) establishment potential, and (4) spread potential. Elements describing consequences of introduction included (5) economic damage potential, (6) environmental damage potential, and (7) social and political considerations. To improve rating consistency, objectivity, and transparency, risk criteria were developed to define each element. In addition to the qualitative rankings, quantitative projections of economic impact were developed for seven of the potential pest species or groups based upon hypothetical scenarios of introduction and spread. Cumulative economic impacts over 30 years following pest introduction are expected to range from the tens of millions to over a billion dollars, depending upon pest species, introduction location, spread rate, and damage level. Examples of high pest risk potential for the SWPM pathway exist in both temperate and tropical and subtropical regions of origin, both conifer and hardwood host types, and for the three primary pest habitats (in deep wood, under bark, on bark) of the SWPM host material being transported. Organisms with high pest risk potentials are unlikely to be excluded solely through inspection activities and associated interdiction actions at ports of entry. Given the ubiquity of the SWPM pathway, its associated pests, and the difficulties in tracing and identifying SWPM origins and compositions, it appears that worldwide application of more stringent importation requirements may be warranted.

Keywords: Solid wood packing materials, import regulation, exotic tree pest introduction, invasive species

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	ix
Nature of the Problem	ix
Purpose and Scope	ix
SWPM Pathway Characteristics	ix
Introduction Potential	x
Consequences of Introduction: Potential Environmental Impacts	xi
Consequences of Introduction: Potential Economic Impacts	xi
Pest Risk Potential	xiii
Conclusion	xiv
Nature of the Problem	1
Statement of Purpose	1
Scope of Assessment	2
Assessment Approach	2
Definition of SWPM	4
Summary of Current U.S. Regulations for SWPM	7
Brief History of SWPM Regulations	7
Current Status of SWPM Regulations	8
Description of SWPM Pathways	8
Initiation, Approach, and Distribution of Pest Risk in the Pathway	9
Evaluation of Inspection as a Mitigation Measure	24
Characterizing Risk in the SWPM Pathway	26
Likelihood of Introduction	27
Past Pest Interceptions and Establishments Associated With SWPM	27
Potential for Entry and Establishment of Pests Transported With SWPM	31
Consequences of Introduction	33
Resources at Risk	33
Potential Environmental Impacts of Pests Transported With SWPM	35
Potential Economic Impacts of Pests Transported With SWPM	44
Pest Risk Potential for Selected Pests That May Be Transported With SWPM	89
Conclusions	104
Acknowledgments	107
Appendix A: Summary of Interception Records for Pests Found With SWPM	109
Appendix B: Case Histories of Previous Introductions of Forest Pests	119
Asian Longhorned Beetle	119
Chestnut Blight	120
Dutch Elm Disease	122
Formosan Subterranean Termite	124

Gypsy Moth (European biotype)	126
Pine Shoot Beetle	128
Pine Wilt Disease (Pinewood Nematode)	130
Smaller Japanese Cedar Longhorned Beetle	132
Appendix C: Pest Risk Assessment Process	134
Appendix D: Analysis of Pest Risk Potential for Representative Species	141
Wood Pathogens	143
Root and Stem Rots	143
Heterobasidion Root Rot	148
Brown Root Rot	152
Stains and Wilts	154
Canker Stain	162
Pink Disease	165
Wood Borers	167
Asian Longhorned Beetle	167
A Sirex Woodwasp	172
Drywood Termites	175
Subterranean Termites	179
Bark Beetles	183
Red-Haired Pine Bark Beetle	183
European Spruce Bark Beetle	186
Mediterranean Pine Engraver Beetle	190
European Oak Bark Beetle	194
Defoliators	198
Gypsy Moth (Asian Biotype)	198
Nun Moth	202
Purple Moth	205
La Grilleta	208
Sapsucking Insects	211
Pine Flat Bug	211
Appendix E: Methodologies for Economic Damage Projections	214
Appendix F: References	224
Literature Cited	224
Directory of Personal Communications	262
Appendix G: Biographical Sketches of Contributors	266

List of Tables

- Table 1.** Matrix of representative pest species selected for individual assessments of pest risk potential
- Table 2.** Percentage of imported cargo containing SWPM arriving in the United States by world regions, as determined by random sampling, October 1998–March 1999 (APHIS AQIM data base)
- Table 3.** Commodities associated with multiple interceptions of pests with solid wood packing materials imported into the United States and Canada (from Government of Canada, Canadian Food Inspection Service)
- Table 4.** Summary of assumptions used to develop economic loss projections for some representative pest species that could be introduced to the United States with SWPM
- Table 5.** Projected yearly and cumulative monetary losses discounted 7 percent per year (in thousands of dollars) owing to costs to control a new drywood termite in wooden structures based on the assumption of introduction into San Diego, CA
- Table 6.** Projected yearly timber volume loss (in thousand cubic feet) of eucalyptus plantations in Hawaiian island groups expected to be affected by pink disease following introduction of *Erythricium salmonicolor*
- Table 7.** Projected cumulative monetary loss discounted 7 percent per year (in thousands of dollars) for eucalyptus plantations by Hawaiian island group owing to damage by pink disease following introduction of *Erythricium salmonicolor*
- Table 8.** Projected yearly acreage of coffee plantations by Hawaiian island group expected to be affected by pink disease following introduction of *Erythricium salmonicolor*
- Table 9.** Projected cumulative monetary crop loss discounted 7 percent per year (in thousands of dollars) for coffee plantations by Hawaiian island group owing to damage by pink disease following introduction of *Erythricium salmonicolor*
- Table 10.** Genera and species assignments in Asian longhorned beetle (ALB) preference classes (V. Mastro 1999, personal communication). Preferred class indicates trees that are known hosts in the United States, China, or both countries on the basis of literature or verified ALB exit holes. Oviposition–genera class indicates (a) that the tree species has been attacked but ALB development in the tree has not yet been confirmed, (b) a genera with only one known host species, or (c) both of these occurrences.
- Table 11.** Estimated tree resources at risk for infestation by Asian longhorned beetle (ALB) in eight cities
- Table 12.** Projected percentage of city area potentially affected following introduction of Asian longhorned beetle (ALB) for eight U.S. cities at a spread rate of 3 km/yr (worst-case scenario)
- Table 13.** Projected percentage of city area potentially affected following introduction of the Asian longhorned beetle at a spread rate of 300 m/yr (best case)
- Table 14.** Estimated cumulative number of preferred host trees potentially infested following introduction of ALB at a spread rate of 3 km/yr (worst case)
- Table 15.** Estimated cumulative compensatory value (discounted 7 percent per year) of preferred host trees potentially infested by ALB following introduction at a spread rate of 3 km/yr (worst-case scenario)

Table 16. Estimated cumulative percentage of tree mortality potentially caused by ALB following introduction at a spread rate of 3 km/yr (worst-case scenario)

Table 17. Estimated cumulative number of preferred host trees potentially infested following introduction of ALB at a spread rate of 300 m/yr (best case)

Table 18. Estimated cumulative compensatory value (discounted 7 percent per year) of preferred hosts potentially infested by the ALB following introduction at a spread rate of 300 m/yr (best-case scenario)

Table 19. Asian longhorned beetle (ALB) host preference class differences in eight cities based on number of live trees and associated current compensatory value

Table 20. Percentage of tree mortality potentially caused by the ALB following introduction at a spread rate of 300 m/yr (best-case scenario)

Table 21. Projected yearly timber volume losses (in thousand cubic feet) for forested lands due to damage by the Asian longhorned beetle

Table 22. Projected cumulative monetary timber losses (in thousands of 1997 dollars discounted 7 percent) for the Asian longhorned beetle

Table 23. Projected yearly timber volume losses (in thousand cubic feet) due to damage by *Sirex noctilio*

Table 24. Projected cumulative monetary losses in timber production (in thousands of 1998 dollars discounted 7 percent) for *Sirex noctilio*

Table 25. Projected yearly timber volume losses (in thousand cubic feet) due to damage by the European spruce bark beetle

Table 26. Projected cumulative monetary timber losses (in thousands of 1998 dollars discounted 7 percent) for the European spruce bark beetle

Table 27. Projected yearly timber volume losses (in thousand cubic feet) due to damage by the nun moth

Table 28. Projected cumulative timber losses (in thousands of 1998 dollars discounted 7 percent) due to damage by the nun moth

Table 29. Projected yearly timber volume losses (in thousand cubic feet) due to damage by heterobasidion root rot

Table 30. Projected cumulative monetary timber losses (in thousands of 1998 dollars discounted 7 percent) for heterobasidion root rot

Table 31. Summary of pest risk potentials for 19 representative pests of concern that may be transported with solid wood packing materials (in deep wood, under bark, or on bark)

Table A-1. Pest taxa intercepted with solid wood packing materials at U.S. ports of entry or warehouses during 1996–98 as recorded in the PIN–309 data base as of June 10–16, 1999

Table A-2. Summary of taxonomic families intercepted in cargo shipments containing solid wood packing materials at U.S. ports of entry during 1996–98 as recorded in the PIN–309 data base as of June 10–16, 1999

Table A-3. Countries of origin for cargo from which exotic pests were intercepted with solid wood packing materials at U.S. ports of entry during 1996–98 as recorded in the PIN–309 data base as of June 10–16, 1999

Table A-4. Continents of origin for cargo from which exotic pests were intercepted with solid wood packing materials at U.S. ports of entry during 1996–98 as recorded in the PIN–309 data base as of June 10–16, 1999

Table A-5. Destination State or territory as indicated on the shipping manifest for cargo from which exotic pests were intercepted with solid wood packing materials at U.S. ports of entry during 1996–98 as recorded in the PIN–309 data base as of June 10–16, 1999

Table C-1. Description of uncertainty codes used with specific elements in the individual pest risk assessment process

Table C-2. Method for estimating consequences of introduction for an individual pest risk assessment

Table C-3. Method for determining pest risk potential from likelihood of introduction and consequences of introduction

Table D-1. Representative pest species selected for analyses

Table D-2. *Armillaria* species, hosts, and distribution

Table D-3. *Phellinus* species, hosts, and distribution

Table D-4. Species of *Ceratocystis* and *Ophiostoma*

Table D-5. Host and locality of selected Chinese bark and ambrosia beetles

List of Figures

- Figure 1.** U.S. transportation network of major highways.
- Figure 2.** Ports of entry with cargo shipments in 1998–99 containing SWPM that required treatment before inland movement owing to the presence of bark or live pest interceptions.
- Figure 3.** Importer locations (i.e., destinations) for cargo shipments containing SWPM in 1998–99 that required treatment at the port of entry because of the presence of bark or live pest interceptions.
- Figure 4.** Importer locations for cargo shipments containing SWPM in 1998–99 that required treatment at the port of entry because of the presence of bark or live pest interceptions.
- Figure 5.** Top importer locations for cargo shipments with SWPM requiring treatment in 1998–99 upon entry because of the presence of bark or live pest interceptions. Twenty-six locations (17 percent) accounted for 55 percent (178/321) of all cargo shipments with SWPM requiring treatment.
- Figure 6.** Importer locations for cargo shipments with SWPM requiring treatment in 1998–99 upon entry because of the presence of bark or live pest interceptions. Forty-six importer locations (30 percent) accounted for 68 percent (218/321) of all cargo shipments with SWPM requiring treatments.
- Figure 7.** Highest concentrations of importer locations for cargo shipments with SWPM requiring treatment in 1998–99 upon entry because of the presence of bark or live pest interceptions.
- Figure 8.** Number of cargo shipments with SWPM in 1998–99 by importer State requiring treatment because of the presence of bark or live pest interceptions.
- Figure 9.** Percentages of cargo shipments with SWPM in 1998–99 by importer State requiring treatment because of the presence of bark or live pest interceptions. Northeastern States collectively comprised 16 percent of interdictions.
- Figure 10.** Distribution of U.S. forests by density class.
- Figure 11.** Number of trees (in all diameter classes) by county as derived from Forest Inventory and Analysis data.
- Figure 12.** Distribution of U.S. forests by species groups.
- Figure 13.** Distribution of timber volumes by county on timberlands in the United States as derived from Forest Inventory and Analysis data.
- Figure 14.** Percentages of cargo shipments by country of origin with SWPM in 1998–99 requiring treatment because of the presence of bark or live pest interceptions.
- Figure 15.** Expansion forecast over 30 years for introduction of exotic drywood termites into San Diego, CA.
- Figure 16.** Acreages of eucalyptus and coffee plantations in the Hawaiian islands potentially at risk for introduction of the pathogen that causes pink disease, *Erythricium salmonicolor*.
- Figure 17.** General approach to estimating forest economic losses.

Figure 18. Expansion forecast over 30 years for Asian longhorned beetle introduction into New York, NY, Chicago, IL, and Atlanta, GA, on the assumption of the best-case (slow spread rate) scenario.

Figure 19. Expansion forecast over 30 years for Asian longhorned beetle introduction into New York, NY, Chicago, IL, and Atlanta, GA, on the assumption of the worst-case (faster spread rate) scenario.

Figure 20. Distribution of timber volumes (by county) of potential tree hosts at risk for infestation by the Asian longhorned beetle on timberlands in the continental United States.

Figure 21. Distribution of timber volumes (by county) of potential tree hosts at risk for infestation by the Asian longhorned beetle on timberlands in relation to hypothetical spread from New York, NY, Chicago, IL, and Atlanta, GA.

Figure 22. Distribution of timber volumes (by county) of potential tree hosts at risk for infestation by a sirex woodwasp (*Sirex noctilio*) on timberlands in the continental United States.

Figure 23. Expansion forecast over 30 years for a sirex woodwasp (*Sirex noctilio*) on the assumption of the best-case (slow spread rate) scenario.

Figure 24. Expansion forecast over 30 years for a sirex woodwasp (*Sirex noctilio*) on the assumption of the worst-case (faster spread rate) scenario.

Figure 25. Distribution of timber volumes (by county) of potential tree hosts at risk for infestation by the European spruce bark beetle (*Ips typographus*) on timberlands in the continental United States.

Figure 26. Expansion forecast over 30 years for the European spruce bark beetle (*Ips typographus*) on the assumption of the best-case (slow spread rate) scenario.

Figure 27. Expansion forecast over 30 years for the European spruce bark beetle (*Ips typographus*) on the assumption of the worst-case (faster spread rate) scenario.

Figure 28. Distribution of timber volumes (by county) of potential tree hosts at risk for infestation by the nun moth (*Lymantria monacha*) on timberlands in the continental United States.

Figure 29. Expansion forecast over 30 years for the nun moth (*Lymantria monacha*) on the assumption of the best-case (slow spread rate) scenario.

Figure 30. Expansion forecast over 30 years for the nun moth (*Lymantria monacha*) on the assumption of the worst-case (faster spread rate) scenario.

Figure 31. Distribution of timber volumes (by county) of potential tree hosts at risk for infestation by heterobasidion root rots on timberlands in the continental United States.

Figure 32. Expansion forecast over 30 years for heterobasidion root rots on the assumption of the worst-case (faster spread rate) scenario.

Figure 33. Weibull function for estimating pest damage potential during population buildup period as developed for the *Sirex noctilio* scenario.

Executive Summary

Nature of the Problem

In recent years, increased international trade has resulted in a corresponding increase in the amount of untreated solid wood packing materials (e.g., pallets, crating, dunnage) entering the United States. Recent introductions of the Asian longhorned beetle, *Anoplophora glabripennis* (Motschulsky), and pine shoot beetle, *Tomicus piniperda* (L.), have been associated with importation of solid wood packing materials (SWPM). Between August 1995 and March 1998, 97 percent of pests intercepted by Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) inspectors at United States ports and recognized as potential threats to forest resources of the United States were associated with SWPM.

Purpose and Scope

This pest risk assessment was initiated to support the recognized need to replace the interim rule for China (7 CFR Part 319.40–5, effective 17 December 1998) pertaining to shipment of SWPM with a permanent import regulation that addresses the problem of pest transport in SWPM on a global basis. The purpose of this document is to assess whether additional action is warranted to reduce the risk of transporting exotic pests with SWPM imported into the United States.

This assessment describes pest risk potential in relation to current import regulations and practices and is developed without regard to potential mitigation measures. Mitigation alternatives and other supporting analyses will be developed and evaluated by APHIS separately from this document.

SWPM Pathway Characteristics

The SWPM pathway (i.e., means of transport) poses considerable risk for introducing exotic forest pests into the United States. Shippers may use virtually any species of woody plant—from fresh cut to reused seasoned lumber—and often use low-grade and scrap wood to minimize cost. Any given imported cargo shipment may contain SWPM of varied wood types and ages and from unexpected and multiple origins. Recently, inspectors found that 9 percent of maritime and 4 percent of air shipments containing SWPM had bark present (USDA APHIS AQIM data base) despite import requirements enacted in 1995 that SWPM be bark free (7 CFR 319). The presence of bark allows for survival of many potential pest organisms that feed under bark, particularly bark beetles (Scolytidae) and their associated fungi. Most pests that feed or occur in or on stems and branches of woody plants may be found in or on untreated SWPM. Because of the variability in SWPM content and the inability to identify these differences readily, any given shipment may pose the highest level of pest risk offered by the SWPM pathway.

Trade patterns can significantly influence the kinds and numbers of potential exotic forest pests that may arrive in the United States. Imports have increased in recent years from countries around the world as markets have opened up and trade restrictions have declined. Pest interceptions associated with SWPM were recorded from 64 different countries of origin in 1996–98 (USDA APHIS PIN–309 pest interception data base). About 52 percent of maritime shipments and 9 percent of air shipments imported into the United States are accompanied by SWPM.

The presence of SWPM is generally not identified on a shipping manifest, making it difficult for port inspectors to select shipments for inspection. SWPM can be associated with importations of over 250 different commodities. SWPM may infiltrate the United States through approximately 100 ports of entry and often accompany the cargo to its final destination. SWPM may be reused or reconditioned for additional use, contributing to further redistribution of potentially infested wood. Many primary cargo destinations in population centers coincide with the most heavily forested regions of the United States, which provide abundant host material for pest establishment.

Introduction Potential

Forest insects and pathogens that have life stages closely associated with the trunks of trees, especially those that remain with the host for long periods (e.g., wood borers, bark beetles, deep wood pathogens) may pose the greatest risks of infesting wood materials to be exported. Other potential pests may be present only in certain life stages and seasons (e.g., eggs of some lepidopterous species such as the Asian gypsy moth).

From 1996 through 1998, APHIS inspectors recorded 1,205 interceptions (averaging 402 per year) of live exotic forest pests arriving with SWPM, representing 156 taxa (not species). Coleoptera (beetles) accounted for 94 percent of all interceptions. The most common families were the Scolytidae (bark beetles) and the Cerambycidae (long-horned wood borers). The orders Hymenoptera and Lepidoptera accounted for 3 and 2 percent, respectively, of all interceptions. Although the proportion of interceptions of bark beetles has declined compared with that before implementation of the 1995 wood import regulations (7 CFR 319), the bark-free requirement has not been sufficient to limit entry of bark beetles and provides little or no protection against deep-wood pests such as wood borers and deep-wood pathogens. The lengthy list of insect pests intercepted with SWPM at U.S. ports of entry with origins from around the world demonstrates that environmental conditions in shipping containers and airplane cargo holds are suitable for their survival.

Many pests probably escape detection at ports of entry. Most plant pathogens in cargo shipments are not often or easily detected, isolated, and identified. Inspectors are able to look at only a small percentage of all cargo entering the United States. Increasing use of containerized cargo has also made access for inspection more difficult. Only 1–5 percent of SWPM may be accessible for inspection at the container tailgate. Visual inspections are also labor intensive and inefficient at locating live pests. Given the cumulative barriers to detecting pests arriving with SWPM, port inspections and associated interdiction actions (e.g., treatment, denied entry) appear to be inadequate to reduce the pest risk associated with SWPM.

The potential for pest establishment after entry into the United States is not solely dependent upon frequency of entry or the numbers of organisms that get past APHIS' safeguarding (protection) efforts. The pest also must be able to locate suitable hosts and environmental conditions and be capable of reproducing viable populations. Forests in the United States will provide ideal colonization opportunities for many if not most immigrant tree-infesting organisms owing to the extent of forest land in nearly every region of the country and the large number of tree genera also common to Eurasia and elsewhere. Forest land covers about one-third of the land area of the United States and is widely but unevenly distributed. About two-thirds of the forested land is capable of producing commercial timber. Although closed canopies of conifers and broad-leaved deciduous trees typical of the humid parts of the Temperate Zone predominate in forests of the continental United States, tropical forests exist in Hawaii, southern Florida, Puerto Rico, and the Pacific Islands. Potential forest resources at risk include about 500 species of trees in 73 plant families in the continental United States, over 300 species in Hawaii, more than 500 species in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, and numerous tropical species and fruit tree crops in American Samoa. There are sizable industries devoted to production of ornamentals, Christmas trees, and tree fruit and nut production. Urban tree plantings often are the first sites of new pest introductions given the concentrations of trade and diverse tree species in populated areas.

North American forests are highly vulnerable to invasion by exotic pests. Case histories of past introductions of insects and pathogens that may be transported with SWPM demonstrate the kinds of pest biologies and damage that can occur when organisms become established in new environments. Several introduced species were unknown as pests in their native habitats. At least 5 percent of the non-indigenous forest insect species and half of the exotic forest pathogens established in North America have become such serious pests that they threaten the health, productivity, stability, merchantability, and even the very existence of some trees and forests.

Consequences of Introduction: Potential Environmental Impacts

Certain kinds of pest damage are clearly more serious than others because not all kinds of plant injuries are repaired or compensated for physiologically to the same degree. Among 13 insect feeding guilds (or habits), those causing the lowest plant recovery capacity and highest impact are borers in the inner bark (phloem, cambium) and sapwood of the roots, root crowns, and main stems. Organisms that invade living, vascular tissues, such as phloem and sapwood, may very likely induce powerful hypersensitive reactions in the plant that can cause the swift death and plugging of such tissues. When this happens, rapid death of twigs, branches, and ultimately the entire plant results. In addition to wood-invading beetles and fungi, nematodes, true aphids, and adelgids can also trigger severe defense reactions by plants. Moreover, any herbivore that transmits or acts as a vector for plant pathogenic fungi, bacteria, phytoplasmas, and viruses can have high potential for plant injury.

Ecological disruption from an exotic pest increases exponentially as the proportion of susceptible plants in a landscape increases. Significant impacts can result from a pest with very broad host plant preferences or from a pest with narrow host preferences for trees having vast, nearly pure populations. Ecological impact can also be significant for pests that attack hosts with limited distributions when they play vital ecological roles. The most devastating potential impact resulting from introduction of an exotic forest pest is the extinction of an ecologically dominant plant species. The significant decline of the American chestnut following introduction of chestnut blight is an example. Biodiversity may be reduced not only because of loss of the tree species but also of wildlife and other organisms that depend upon that habitat. Short of species extinction, depredations of exotics may alter typical plant abundance and distribution patterns. Attacked plants may gradually be eliminated from certain localized areas. Introduction of exotics may also diminish tree and forest productivity. Pest damage in turn may effect substantial changes in nutrient cycling and retention, hydrology, soil erosion, and capacity for reforestation. Extensive tree mortality would benefit some animals and threaten others, lower water quality, alter regional hydrology, increase the probability of wildfire, and reduce the carbon storage capacity of North American forests. As exotic plant-feeding organisms establish themselves in an ecosystem, they may also outcompete native insects and microorganisms and hence push them into declining abundance.

Consequences of Introduction: Potential Economic Impacts

Activity by forest pest species can result in a variety of economic losses due to damage to trees, forests, or wooden structures. Depending upon the pest species and the hosts attacked, economic losses may be reflected in

- tree mortality and timber volume loss;
- wood defects and degradation;
- tree growth loss;
- decreased production of products such as maple syrup, fruits, nuts, or seed;
- reduction in property values;
- damage to property due to tree failures;
- losses in recreation visitor days and tourism;
- increased human health problems (e.g., allergic reactions to pests, injuries from tree failures);
- higher energy costs (e.g., resulting from loss of shade);
- increased costs for mitigating pest damage or restoring habitat;
- and many other indirect effects.

Once an exotic pest becomes established, controlling its population is never simple or cheap.

Given biological and ecological uncertainties, the potential for economic damage can be difficult to quantify or predict, especially for those pest species that threaten but have not yet become established in a new environment. Assumptions that describe potential scenarios of introduction and spread over 30 years were devised to develop quantitative projections of resource and monetary losses for seven representative exotic pest species or groups. The low and high extremes of potential spread rates and damage potentials defined the best-case and worst-case

scenarios, respectively, for each pest.

Potential impacts to wooden structures are illustrated by the hypothetical introduction of a drywood termite into San Diego, CA. Control costs (discounted to present value at 7 percent per year) over 30 years would range from about \$17 million to \$109 million, depending upon spread rate.

If pink disease [caused by *Erythricium salmonicolor* (Berk. & Broome) Burdsall] were introduced to the State of Hawaii, it could be expected to spread throughout island groups within 7–13 years. Cumulative discounted monetary losses during that time resulting from growth loss in eucalyptus plantations were estimated at \$3–39 million for different island groups and scenarios. Growth losses following the initial establishment period would likely range annually from several hundred thousand to several million cubic feet of timber volume. Coffee production in the Hawaiian islands would also be heavily impacted with cumulative discounted losses after 13 years under the best-case scenarios of \$3–6 million, depending upon island group affected, and \$6–14 million after 7 years for the worst-case scenarios.

Potential economic impacts to the urban tree resources of eight U.S. cities were estimated using calculations of compensatory values of preferred host trees that would likely be killed following introductions of the Asian longhorned beetle. Tree resources at risk (i.e., preferred hosts) ranged from a high of 63 percent of trees in Chicago, IL, to 12 percent in Oakland, CA. At a slow natural spread rate, cumulative discounted compensatory values of potentially affected trees would range from about \$25 million in Jersey City, NJ, to \$403 million in Baltimore, MD, after 30 years. For a faster spread rate based upon redistribution of infested materials by human activities, beetle populations would be expected to spread throughout entire urban areas within 6 years (in the absence of any eradication or control efforts), and the cumulative discounted compensatory values of damaged trees would range from \$39 million to \$1.3 billion, depending upon the city infested. Additional losses in the tens to hundreds of million cubic feet of timber volume per year could be expected, depending upon location and spread rates, if beetle populations expanded beyond the urban centers to kill trees in commercial timberlands.

Of three locations modeled for introduction of a sirex woodwasp (*Sirex noctilio* F.) into commercial timberlands, the area around Atlanta, GA, would be expected to sustain the greatest damage levels with maximum annual volume losses of 550 million cubic feet to more than 6 billion cubic feet for the best and worst cases, respectively. Cumulative discounted values of timber loss due to tree mortality over 30 years would range from \$48 million to \$607 million. For timber production around Minneapolis, MN, and San Francisco, CA, cumulative discounted monetary losses over 30 years would be between \$7 million and \$77 million, depending upon spread rates.

The European spruce bark beetle [*Ips typographus* (L.)] was assumed to attack and kill only spruce, which is limited to timberland areas in the Northern United States and high elevations of the mountainous West. At the slower rate of spread, populations are expected to remain very localized. However, under a worst-case scenario, values of annual timber volume loss could range up to 919 million cubic feet for introduction into Minneapolis, 758 million cubic feet for introduction into New York, and 98 million cubic feet for introduction into Seattle. Cumulative discounted values for timber loss after 30 years would be \$101 million for Minneapolis, \$93 million for New York, and \$14 million for Seattle.

Annual timber losses resulting from defoliation by nun moth (*Lymantria monacha* L.) could range as high as 100–700 million cubic feet, depending upon location of introduction, under the best-case scenario. Damage levels would be more variable under the worst-case scenario, with maximum annual losses of 3–8 billion cubic feet. Depending on location, cumulative discounted monetary losses over 30 years was estimated to range from \$28 million to \$169 million for the best-case scenario and \$721 million to \$921 million for the worst-case scenario.

Heterobasidion root rots are expected to spread quite slowly; therefore, maximum annual volume losses for a single introduction point would likely reach only 16 million cubic feet even under the worst-case scenario. Cumulative discounted timber value losses after 30 years under worst-case assumptions would range from about \$266,500 in

Portland, OR, to \$1.8 million in Atlanta, GA. Past introductions of other forest pathogens with faster spread rates demonstrate the high potential for economic damage for some wood pathogens, however.

Pest Risk Potential

Pest risk potential for a given organism and pathway is determined by the likelihood and the consequences of introduction. The likelihood that an organism will move to, and become established in, a new environment is related to the chance of its being associated with the host or commodity being moved, its survivability during transport, its ability to locate and colonize suitable hosts in its new environment, and its ability to reproduce and spread. Consequences of introduction are defined by potential economic and environmental impacts and social and political concerns. Criteria were developed to evaluate these risk elements qualitatively.

Pest risk potential was described qualitatively with ratings of low, moderate, or high risk for 19 representative insect and pathogen species or groups that may be transported with SWPM. Selected organisms were chosen to represent combinations of geographic origin (i.e., temperate, or tropical and subtropical), host type (i.e., conifers or hardwoods), pest habitat (i.e., in deep wood, under bark, or on bark), and a variety of pest types. Selected species or groups evaluated for pest risk potential were as follows:

1. Root and stem rots (caused by *Armillaria* spp., *Phellinus* spp., and *Ganoderma* spp.),
2. Heterobasidion root rots (caused by *Heterobasidion* spp.),
3. Brown root rot [caused by *Phellinus noxius* (Corner) G.H. Cunn.],
4. Stains and wilts (caused by *Ophiostoma* spp. and *Ceratocystis* spp.),
5. Canker stain (caused by *Ceratocystis fimbriata* Ellis & Halstead),
6. Pink disease [caused by *Erythricium salmonicolor* (Berk. & Broome) Burdsall],
7. Asian longhorned beetle [*Anoplophora glabripennis* (Motschulsky)],
8. A sirex woodwasp and associated fungus [*Sirex noctilio* F./*Amylostereum areolatum* (Fries) Boidin],
9. Drywood termites (*Cryptotermes* spp., *Incisitermes* spp. and *Kalotermites* spp.),
10. Subterranean termites (*Coptotermes* spp. and *Reticulitermes* spp.),
11. Red-haired pine bark beetle and associated fungi [*Hylurgus ligniperda* (F.)/*Leptographium* spp.],
12. European spruce bark beetle and associated fungi [*Ips typographus* (L.)/*Ceratocystis* spp.],
13. Mediterranean pine engraver beetle (*Orthotomicus erosus* Wollaston),
14. European oak bark beetle [*Scolytus intricatus* (Ratzeburg)],
15. Asian gypsy moth (*Lymantria dispar* L.),
16. Nun moth (*Lymantria monacha* L.),
17. Purple moth (*Sarsina violascens* Herrich-Schaeffer),
18. La grilleta (*Pterophylla beltrani* Bolivar y Bolivar), and
19. Pine flat bug (*Aradus cinnamomeus* Panzer).

Pest risk potential was rated as high for most organisms evaluated, although root and stem rots (*Armillaria* spp., *Phellinus* spp., *Ganoderma* spp.) and the orthopteran, *Pterophylla beltrani*, were rated as presenting only moderate risk. All but one of the assessed organisms rated high for presence with host or commodity at origin potential and entry potential, which indicates that the SWPM pathway is a viable route of entry to the United States for these organisms. Establishment potential, spread potential, and types of potential damage varied with biological characteristics of the organisms rated.

Evaluation of the 19 selected potential pest species or groups demonstrates that significant pest risk potential exists for many types of organisms that may be transported with SWPM into the United States and its territories. Examples of high pest risk potential for the SWPM pathway exist in both temperate and tropical and subtropical regions of origin, both conifer and hardwood host types, and for the three primary habitats (in deep wood, under bark, and on bark) of the SWPM host material being transported. Organisms with high pest risk potential are unlikely to be excluded adequately solely through inspections and associated interdiction actions at ports of entry.

Organisms (such as fungal root rots, stains and wilts, and wood-boring beetles, wasps and termites) that utilize the interior portions of wood represent a wide array of taxa with varied biologies; however, they all have a survival advantage in being physically protected within the host material and being difficult to detect in SWPM. Damage caused by organisms that inhabit interior portions of wood often results in defects and degradation that can cause tree failure and tree mortality, or structural damage in the case of wood buildings. Species that utilize deep wood material are common in both conifer and hardwood hosts. The greatest differences in the potentials of these kinds of organisms to become established in a new environment likely result from disparities in the ability to move from SWPM to new host tree material, rates of population increase, and rates of spread.

Bark beetles and some plant pathogens (such as those causing canker diseases) utilize the nutrient-rich inner bark and cambium of trees and are frequently transported with SWPM. Bark beetles characteristically have a high potential for dispersal, colonization, population increase, and spread; therefore, as a group they have a high potential for establishment. Those bark beetle species that have the ability to attack, colonize, and kill live trees, consequently, will have high pest risk potentials. Destructive species of bark beetles are generally more common in conifer hosts, but some of the most destructive bark beetle–fungal associations that have become established in North America have involved hardwood hosts.

Potential tree pests that may be transported on bark attached to SWPM may include a variety of taxa and pest habits. Life stages may be sessile (i.e., permanently attached like scale insects), hidden in bark crevices, or adherent to the bark with gluelike substances (e.g., egg masses). Many are difficult to detect owing to cryptic coloration, concealment in cracks, or small size. Survivability during transport may be high because of a dormant or environmentally resistant state (e.g., eggs or spores). Although some potential pests that may be transported on bark of SWPM can cause damage by sucking plant juices out of stems and tree trunks (e.g., some bark-inhabiting Hemiptera and Homoptera), others may be more damaging to other plant parts once established in a suitable environment (e.g., Lepidoptera and Orthoptera). Consequences of introduction are probably more varied for pests that may occur on bark for this reason and range from cosmetic injury to growth reduction to tree mortality.

Conclusion

Given the ubiquitousness of the SWPM pathway and associated pests and difficulties in tracing SWPM origins and identifying SWPM compositions, application of more stringent importation requirements, regardless of country of origin, appears to be warranted. Employment of effective mitigation measures that can reduce the likelihood that live pests will be transported with SWPM has the potential to reduce greatly the risk of introducing destructive exotic forest pests; however, evaluation of potential mitigation measures will be conducted separately from this document.

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