

Protecting Our Environment

How Hikers And Campers Can Help Nature

(NAPS)—The next time you enjoy the great outdoors, you can also help protect it from invasive pests that threaten to destroy America's national parks and forests.

These insects harm trees and plants, displace native species and disrupt ecosystems—costing the nation about \$120 billion each year in damages. The pests come from other countries and can spread quickly, since they have few or no natural predators here.

In particular, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) asks outdoor enthusiasts to be aware of 19 destructive, invasive species known as Hungry Pests.

That's because these pests, which include the emerald ash borer and Asian longhorned beetle, are primarily spread in the things people move and pack.

Tips for Outdoor Enthusiasts

Hikers and campers can help protect the great outdoors by following a few simple tips:

- Before leaving for or from a camping trip, remove mud and dirt from cars and recreational vehicles to prevent moving invasive pests and their eggs to new areas. Be sure to clean debris from tires and wheel wells, as well as tires on mountain or other bikes you may use.

- Likewise, clean dirt from shoes, boots, backpacks and other gear.

- Although it may be tempting, don't bring back flowers, plants, leaves or other natural souvenirs discovered in the wild, as they could have invasive pests attached to them. Take photos instead and leave nature in nature.

- If you're planning to enjoy an outdoor campfire, remember, don't



The next time you go hiking or camping, follow USDA's six tips to protect nature from invasive pests.

move firewood. That's the easiest way to spread invasive species that can be hidden inside.

- Use only wood that has been responsibly harvested near the place you plan to burn it. Alternatively, you can buy wood that has been heat-treated or certified as safe to use. Many national and regional parks no longer let people bring in firewood from elsewhere.

By doing so, you could not only face a hefty fine, but bring in pests that destroy the beautiful wild spaces you love.

- Gypsy moths eat more than 300 species of trees and shrubs. In the northeast quarter of the country, look for their egg masses attached to outdoor items, such as furniture you bring on your camping trip. Even items stored in a shed or garage could hide them. Carefully remove and immerse egg masses in soapy water. If you spot any outside of quarantined areas, report them to state agricultural officials.

Learn More

For further facts and tips, go to HungryPests.com, or join the conversation on Facebook or Twitter.