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City and County of Denver
Parks and Recreation

Jill McGranahan
Director of Marketing &
Communications
O. 720-913-0633

jill.mcgranahan@denvergov.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thousand Cankers Disease a Threat to Denver Black Walnuts

DENVER – July 13, 2009 -- Black walnut trees in Denver are facing a very serious new threat called thousand cankers disease. This recently recognized problem has already devastated black walnut trees in Colorado Springs and Boulder and is believed to have been active in Denver for at least three years.

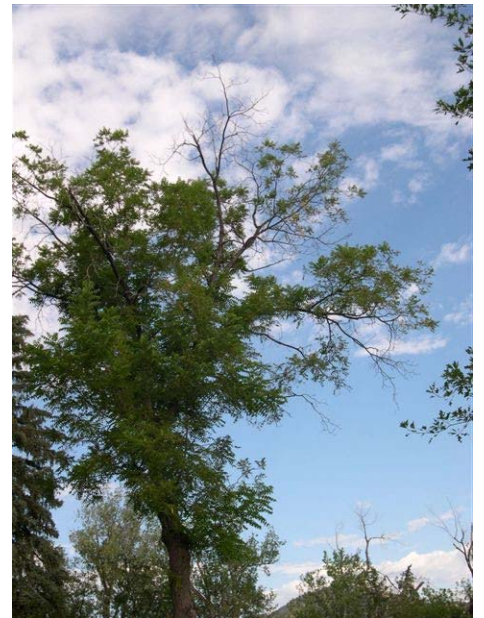
Thousand cankers disease is caused by a newly discovered fungus that is carried to trees by a tiny twig beetle. “The fungus then colonizes and kills a small area of the bark surrounding beetle galleries,” said Ned Tisserat, a plant pathologist at Colorado State University, who first identified the fungus last summer. “The number of beetle galleries and associated dead bark, called cankers, in a tree is enormous. Cankers eventually fuse and girdle limbs and the trunk so that nutrients can no longer move in the tree.”

Trees typically die within a couple of years after they first show symptoms of leaf yellowing and branch dieback.

The walnut twig beetle, a native insect of the Southwest, is usually associated with the Arizona walnut tree, to which it is not harmful. The beetle is, however, harmful to the black walnut tree which is highly valued as an ornamental tree. Although the black walnut tree is native to the East, it has been planted extensively throughout the West.

Jude O’Connor, City Forester for Denver, states, “The most immediate concern in Denver is the loss of this valued tree from our community forest canopy, although the bigger concern nationwide is, if thousand cankers disease moves east where black walnut is a common forest species, this tree may be lost entirely.”

“I think thousand cankers disease has the potential to devastate black walnut just as Dutch elm disease nearly wiped out American elm and chestnut blight eliminated American chestnut,” said Whitney Cranshaw, an entomologist at Colorado State. “Right now, the disease is contained in the West but all it would take is one careless individual moving a walnut log with the beetles, and we could have an outbreak that could quickly spiral out of control.”



A black walnut in Boulder showing typical patterns of decline.

O'Connor reminds residents, "Early detection and prompt sanitation are keys to slowing the spread of this disease. Denver residents with black walnut trees should call the City Forester's Office at 720-913-0651 to schedule a free inspection of their tree." No walnut logs with bark intact should be allowed to move further east than where the disease is currently known to prevent this disease's spread. As many as 30,000 adult beetles can be contained in a log as small as 6" in diameter and 18" long – an astounding 90 beetles per square inch.

For more information, please visit www.denvergov.org/forestry or www.ext.colostate.edu/pubs/insect/0812_alert.pdf.

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