BLACK ASH
Background Information

Distribution and Abundance

Black Ash is a medium-sized, shade-intolerant hardwood tree species that occurs on moist to wet sites such as wetlands and floodplains. The species occurs throughout most of the province, incorporating all of southern Ontario and extending north to Albany River and Moose River drainages near James Bay. In 2018, the Ontario population was estimated at 82 million trees found across 1.2 million hectares.

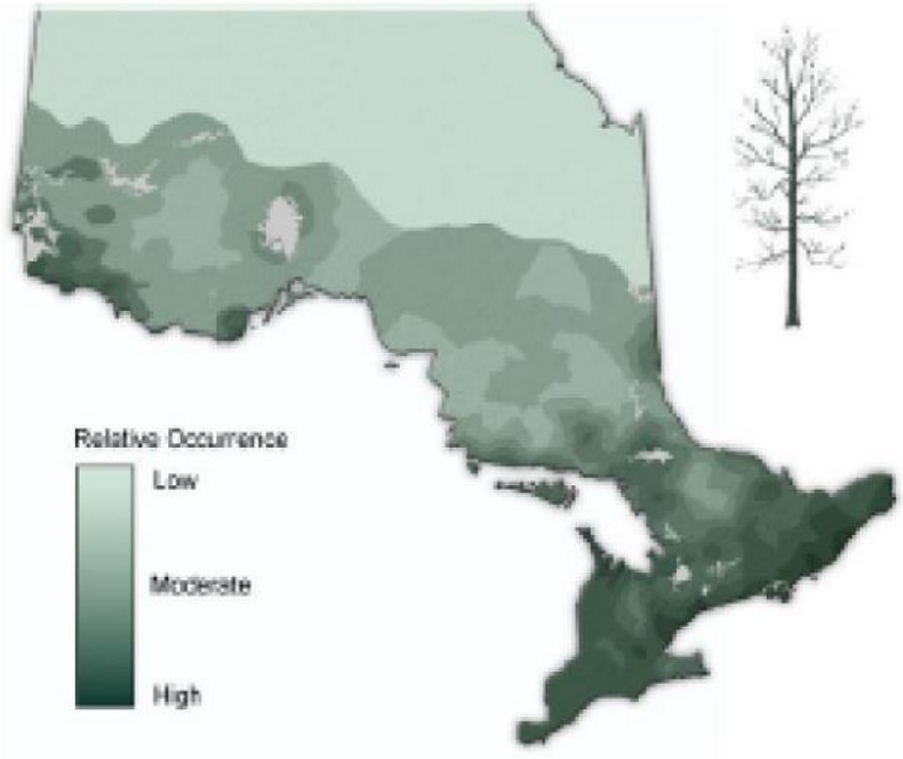

Figure 1. Relative occurrence of Black Ash (*Fraxinus nigra*) from the Forest Management Guide to Silviculture in the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence and Boreal Forests of Ontario.

Assessment and Classification

The Committee on the Status of Species at Risk in Ontario (COSSARO) is an independent committee of experts, including members with expertise in scientific disciplines, community knowledge or Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge, that is responsible for assessing species at risk in Ontario and provides classifications to the Minister of the Environment Conservation and Parks.

Under the *Endangered Species Act, 2007* (ESA), COSSARO is required to maintain and prioritize a list of species to be assessed, including every Ontario species assessed by the federal Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC).

Black Ash was assessed by COSEWIC as Threatened in 2018 which triggered the need for COSSARO to include the species on their priority list for assessment. COSSARO's priority list does not currently include any other ash species.

COSSARO classified Black Ash as Endangered because its abundance in Ontario is projected to decline significantly (i.e., by more than 70 percent over the next 100 years) as the result of invasive Emerald Ash Borer (EAB).

Read *COSSARO's Species at Risk Evaluation Report for Black Ash*

Read *COSEWIC's Assessment and Status Report for Black Ash*

Threats

The primary threat to Black Ash is the invasive Emerald Ash Borer (EAB), a wood-boring beetle that infests and kills ash trees. EAB has caused severe mortality of ash species throughout the northeastern United States and southern Canada. It was introduced to the Detroit-Windsor area in the 1990s and has since been detected in almost all counties in southern Ontario, as well as in Sault Ste. Marie and on Manitoulin Island.

Most of the Ontario Black Ash range remains unaffected by EAB, however analyses suggest that 53% of Black Ash range is considered susceptible.

The federal Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) has the legislated responsibility for preventing pests of quarantine significance (such as EAB) from entering or spreading within Canada. Ontario has supported CFIA efforts in various ways, including supporting research to develop methods for finding new infestations, understanding the ecology of EAB and undertaking public outreach and holding workshops.

Research into methods to control EAB is ongoing, and as a result, CFIA's focus is currently on slowing or preventing the spread of the insect within Ontario. It is thought that biological control and natural tree resistance may play increasingly important roles in managing this insect's populations.

Read more about Emerald Ash Borer.

Recovering Black Ash

Once listed under the ESA, species classified as endangered or threatened are automatically protected from being harmed or harassed. Their general habitat (the area on which a species depends, directly or indirectly, to carry out its life processes) also receives automatic protection. In addition to these protections, the Act prohibits the possession, transportation, purchase and sale of endangered or threatened species.

Given the classification as an endangered species, the ministry is developing a recovery strategy for Black Ash. This will be completed within a year of its listing on the SARO List and will include science advice to the government on how to recover the species.

Next, the ministry will develop the government response statement for Black Ash which includes the government's policy on how to protect and recover Black Ash. Development of both the recovery strategy and the government response statement will include opportunities for comment on their drafts before being finalized.

Human Activities and Black Ash

Black Ash trees are used for a variety of purposes including lumber, fuelwood, industrial biomass material and for Indigenous traditional uses.

Black Ash wood is strong, highly pliable, has excellent shock resistance and readily separates into thin strips. The wood is valued commercially for items such as tool handles, furniture, panelling, cabinets, door and window frames, interior finish and flooring. It can also be used in electric guitar bodies, occasionally for traditional selfbows and is well-known for its use in woven baskets. Black Ash trees are also widely available in the nursery trade but less commonly planted than other Ash species due to habitat preference (i.e., wet areas).

The species is of significant cultural importance for Indigenous peoples and continues to be used in the production of baskets, snowshoe framing and canoe ribs. It is also used to produce dyes and had many historical medicinal uses. Black Ash basketry remains an important component of the histories, cultures and economies of many Indigenous peoples.

Black Ash trees are encountered during activities related to forest and woodlot management, development, infrastructure, mining, agriculture, and ensuring human health and safety. As Black Ash trees are broadly distributed, it may not be easy or possible to avoid the species when undertaking these activities.

As a result of mortality caused by EAB, it is expected that Black Ash trees will increasingly require removal where they are found near roads, trails, campgrounds and structures, to ensure public health and safety.

Based on early input received from stakeholders, Indigenous communities and members of the public, it is anticipated that the protection of Black Ash trees and their habitat would likely result in significant social and economic impacts for a variety of sectors and individuals across Ontario.

Ontario has several tools available to help ensure flexibility, transparency and certainty for Ontarians while continuing to support species' recovery. In some cases of species at risk, a customized approach that balances the species' recovery with the social and economic realities of Ontarians may be needed.

Given the significant socioeconomic implications for protecting Black Ash, and the desire to gather the relevant scientific information to support the species recovery, the ministry is proposing to pause protections for up to two years. This will give the ministry the time it needs to consider a long-term approach that provides for the protection and recovery of the species while considering the economic realities for Ontarians.

Given how common Black Ash is currently throughout Ontario, and the nature of the threat to the species (i.e., being nonanthropogenic) temporarily pausing protections is not expected to put the species at risk.

Black Ash on Crown Managed Forests

Amendments made to the *Crown Forest Sustainability Act* (CFSA) in 2020 exempt persons from certain provisions of the ESA while conducting forest operations in a managed Crown forest, in accordance with an approved Forest Management Plan (FMP), and on behalf of the Crown or under the authority of a forest resource licence.

These amendments allow for impacts to species at risk and their habitat, including the harvest of species at risk trees from managed Crown forests, but do not allow for the purchase and sale of species at risk.

The CFSA policy framework provides for the sustainable management of Crown forests in a manner that must have regard for plant and animal life, including species at risk, through the direction provided in regulated forest manuals and direction in forest management guides. Approved forest management guides must be followed when developing and implementing forest management plans.

NDMNRF incorporates species at risk direction into forest management guides, as appropriate, based on science and other relevant information, through the forest management guide review process. Forest management plans will continue to be developed based on approved forest management guide direction.

NDMNRF and the forest industry's approach to managing Black Ash will be influenced by its listing under the ESA, and any related species at risk policy direction that is subsequently developed (e.g., government response statement).

Questions related to guidance for management of black ash in forest operations may be directed to Dana Kinsman at dana.kinsman@ontario.ca.
Questions or comments on the proposed regulation for Black Ash, or its upcoming listing under the ESA, can be directed to ESAReg@ontario.ca.