Campaign renewed to stop disease killing Northern California oak trees

By Andrew McGall

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Scientists tracking the spread of the Sudden Oak Death disease in Northern California are renewing their campaign to involve residents in spotting outbreaks, especially in highly susceptible bay laurel trees that spread the infection to oaks.

In the largest "Sudden Oak Death Blitz" to date, researchers are seeking help in 21 coastal California communities from San Luis Obispo to Mendocino County this spring.
The invasive disease is killing tanoak, coast live oak, California black oak, Shreve's oak and canyon live oak trees in California. It is the primary cause of tree mortality in coastal California, with more than 3 million trees having died in 15 counties, including Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Monterey, Napa, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz and Solano since its discovery in the mid-1990s, according to a news release from the California Oak Mortality Task Force.
The disease pathogen Phytophthora ramorum "is a moisture-loving organism that tends to be more active in the fog belt," said project spokeswoman Katie Harrell.
People living near areas known to be affected by the disease are encouraged to attend meetings April 10 through May 30 to learn how to look for the disease.
In the East Bay, the free, one-hour training sessions will be held at 10 a.m. April 11 in the Garden Room of the Orinda Library, 26 Orinda Way, and at 1:30 p.m. April 11 at 159 Mulford Hall, at UC Berkeley.
Information on these and other sessions in Santa Cruz, Saratoga, Burlingame and Marin is at http://nature.berkeley.edu/garbelottowp/?page_id=816

Early detection by volunteers throughout Northern California is essential for containment, and possibly local eradication of the pathogen, said Matteo Garbelotto, a UC Berkeley adjunct professor in environmental science. "We simply couldn't generate the necessary people power without them."

California bay laurel leaf infections generally precede oak and tanoak outbreaks, and participants will be trained to identify and collect symptomatic bay leaves and record sample locations.

Timely detection of the disease on bay laurel leaves is crucial, researchers say, as the risk of infection is highest if infected bay trees are within 200 yards of oaks.

New volunteers are encouraged to bring their iPhone or Android mobiles to upload the free "SODmap mobile," which will help fill in distribution maps of the disease.

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OAK DEATH DISEASE

Information on the disease, ways to combat it and a schedule of training sessions for the public are online at http://nature.berkeley.edu/garbelottowp/?page_id=117