

# PEST HARMING DISTRICT'S WILLOW OAKS

**Restore Mass Ave calls on city government and residents to look for damage to this widespread species; some majestic rows may be declining.**

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WASHINGTON DC (September 28, 2015) Restore Mass Ave (RMA) announced today it has treated the willow oaks on historic Embassy Row infected by a pest called oak lecanium scale (*Parthenolecanium quercifix*).

Many willow oaks along DC streets are suffering badly from oak lecanium scale, said the manager of RMA's project, William Eck of Bartlett Tree Expert Company in Gaithersburg, Md. Today RMA is publishing his warning that the problem is getting worse.

Eck, who is an arborist and local manager for Bartlett, said some of the badly infected trees are majestic willow oaks along the sidewalks of iconic streets such as MacArthur Boulevard, Lowell Street, Loughboro Road and 46th Street in Northwest and other streets.

In the RMA pilot project, where the only trees needing treatment were in the 2500 block of Massachusetts Avenue, one large pin oak had significant damage; the treatment may help it survive. (Pin oak, *Quercus palustris*, is in the same sub-genus as willow oak, *Quercus phellos*, and vulnerable to this scale.) The other trees that were treated are younger and very likely to recover, Eck said.

Deborah Shapley, RMA President, said: "This scale has been around a long time and has been thought not to need treatment. Now, we urge residents and others to look for signs of damage in willow and pin oaks on or near their property, including city sidewalk trees."

"Please consider treatment for less damaged and nearby undamaged trees. Our project shows one way neighbors can work with together, with experts, to combat the pest in groups of infected trees."



**Above: Pin oak in 2500 block of Massachusetts Avenue NW shows damage on upper right.**  
(Photo: RMA)

## Big city trees in danger?

RMA also urges the DC Urban Forestry Administration (UFA) to inform the public whether the threat from this pest is getting worse. The UFA, part of the District Department of Transportation, is in charge of the city's 131,000 sidewalk trees. Willow oak is a desirable species which the agency has planted on many streets for decades. Since the

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- **BILL ECK, BARTLETT**

scale generally faded away each season, treatment was not called for.

Eck of the Bartlett firm said: “This scale infection has become a serious problem around the district each year. Many

of the grandest trees along MacArthur Boulevard, Loughboro Road and Lowell Street are in trouble. They are heavily infested and many are already in severe decline.” He reported bad infestations on M Street and adjacent streets near the Navy Yard.

“It does not seem to be in the city's budget to treat these trees to help suppress the scale infestation,” he said.

## The pest

The lumpy-looking adult females, along twigs, hide thousands of eggs which hatch in early summer. The newly emerged crawlers settle on leaves in late summer and fall and extract sap from the tree's vascular system. People can see a whitish residue, which is the undigested sap dropped by the crawlers; it lands on windshields, plants and pavement below and is known as “honeydew.” In late fall the crawlers move to the twigs and continue feeding through the following spring. Severe scale infections weaken the trees so they die prematurely of other causes.



**Top: Healthy willow oak twigs and leaves.**

**Lower: Infected willow oak. The scales are brown lumps on twigs.**

(Photos: RMA)





## Injection more selective than spray

Injection targets this scale in the tree's internal system like a flu shot in the human body, so it can be more effective than spraying badly infected trees. In the RMA project Bartlett injected acephate (Lepitect infusible). Eck said "the commonly accepted treatments for street trees, soil drench of imidacloprid or bark spray of dinotefuran have been resulting in failures, especially on large trees."

The outcome could be positive for all or nearly all twelve trees treated in the RMA project. "The injection should suppress the scale through the growing season; it normally takes several years for damaging populations of the insect to build back up in the tree," Eck said.

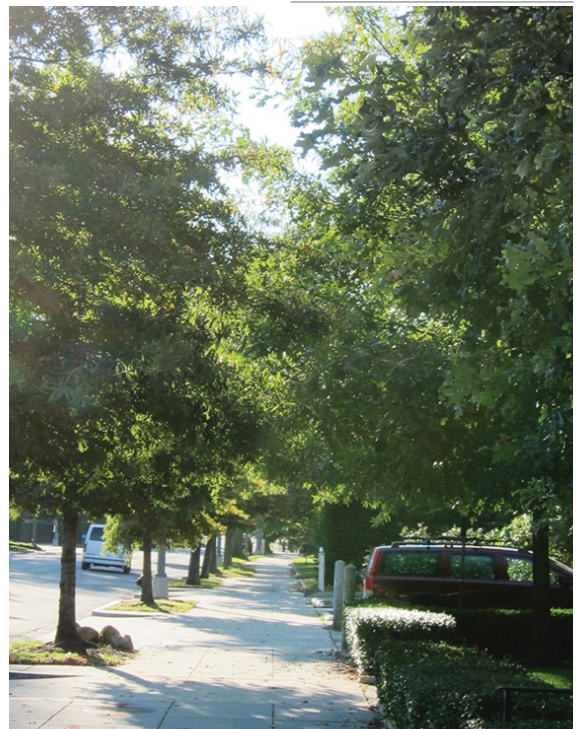
**Left: Crawlers on willow oak leaf.** (Photo: Bartlett)

## Pilot project a model

Restore Mass Ave is a DC nonprofit that works to restore the canopy of major trees that arched over the sidewalks of Massachusetts Avenue a century ago. Since 2006 the group has arranged nearly 330 new trees, mainly between Dupont Circle and Rock Creek Park. It has urged the UFA to plant 170 street trees, mainly linden and elm. The group has also arranged 160 other trees to be planted, many with Casey Trees; about half of these fill in the original "second row" inside the sidewalk that was the signature landscape of the original grand avenue. RMA gets Mass Ave property owners, including embassies, to commit to caring for new and existing trees, including city street trees.

In June, Eck found oak lecanium scale in city sidewalk and nearby second row trees in the 2500 block of Massachusetts Avenue, though fortunately just a few were hard-hit. After consulting with others, RMA hired Bartlett to

**Below: Allée of willow oaks by 2540 Mass Ave. in 2012.** (Photo: RMA)



**“We choose projects which can be models for people to protect and enhance major trees in our city.”**

**-DEBORAH SHAPLEY, RMA PRESIDENT**

treat the twelve trees.

Among them were four “second row” trees, willow oaks and overcup oaks (*Quercus lyrata*) in the lawns in front of 2540 Massachusetts Avenue, which RMA planted with Casey Trees in 2007. They have grown to spectacular size. “When someone asks me for a great example of either species of these trees, I send them a photo or suggest they drive by 2540 Mass,”

he says. A few feet away, the city-owned willow oaks in the sidewalk that were more infected were treated.

The scale insects, of course, do not halt at boundaries between city trees and nearby privately maintained trees. Because the project treated adjacent trees that experts deemed were at risk, it could be a model for how neighborhoods respond. “RMA chooses projects that can be models for people elsewhere in Washington to protect and enhance major trees,” said RMA President Shapley.

Eck said: “A community effort like RMA’s may be the only way to control the scale and save some of the most prominent and beautiful streets in DC.”

## About Restore Mass Ave

View the double row of trees arching over the sidewalk of Mass Ave in 1913, on our site’s [Our Grand Avenue](#) page. Our group promotes watering and mulching and special projects like air-spading compacted soil around city trees. See our [Tree Care](#) pages for what you can do to help trees and expand the city’s tree canopy. The core of our approach is to engage public agencies, non-profits, and private owners including embassies; these are recognized on our [Green Community](#) page. Our organization is run by volunteers; go to our [Volunteer](#) page to apply. We rely on community donations; you may [Donate](#) here. To view/download our award-winning guide to replanting the landscape of Embassy Row, please go to [A Grand Avenue Revival](#). You may send queries and comments to [restoremassave.org/contact-us/](mailto:restoremassave.org/contact-us/).



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