

August 20, 2006

Hidden Springs Ranch Homeowners Association
Dripping Springs, Texas 78620

Subject: Oak Wilt

Dear Neighbor,

As you may already know, oak wilt was recently discovered in the Hidden Springs Ranch (HSR) community and has already killed several trees. Fortunately, these oaks are located in the same general area. But, the fungus is spreading through the oak's interconnecting root system to neighboring trees at a rate of 50-75 feet per year. Unless stopped, many more oaks will be infected and die.

The properties bordering the infected trees are: Dement (547 Broken Lance), Petty (511 Broken Lance), Kraft (416 Shadywood), Tyree (410 Shadywood), Grace (400 Shadywood), Sumrall (208 Lone Wolfe), Schmidt (184 Lone Wolfe), Gillespie (164 Lone Wolfe), and Beebe (450 Shadywood).

Once identified, Robert Edmonson of Texas Forest Service was asked to inspect the area and give an unbiased diagnosis. Mr. Edmonson confirmed without a doubt that the dead and dying trees were and are infected with Oak Wilt. Once identified, treatment and prevention options were discussed at a community wide meeting with Mr. Edmonson and Paula Johnston of Oak Wilt Specialists (OWS).

Measures can be taken to break root connections between live oaks or dense groups of red oaks to reduce or stop root transmission of the oak wilt fungus. The most common technique is to sever roots by trenching at least 4 feet deep with trenching machines, rocksaws or ripper bars. This method (*trenching*) was selected by the homeowners with the oak wilt problem.

Six trenching companies in the area, including OWS, were asked to quote. One was not qualified. Three others decided not to quote. We have received two valid and complete quotes from trusted companies. All properties bordering the oak wilt center have agreed to have trenching done on their properties, and to pay for the trenching up front. The cost of trenching is approximately \$1200 per homeowner for the properties with the trenching.

Although not immediately obvious, **the trench actually benefits properties outside of the trench** rather than those with trees inside of the trench since it is likely that some of the oaks within the trench will become infected and die. Given this, it is unfair that those whose property borders the affected area are left to pay the bill by themselves.



Oaks Infected by Oak Wilt

Since the oak wilt problem affects the entire community, the HOA Board feels that the community should find a way to help offset the cost. The Board discussed the following options:

- **HSR HOA Budget Surplus:** The HSR HOA has the authority to spend Association money on projects that are reasonably related to the property and benefit the community as a whole. The HSR HOA currently has a budget surplus that may be used *in part*, but only if a majority of the homeowners agree by vote. THIS BUDGET SURPLUS IS NOT ENOUGH TO PAY FOR THE TRENCHING IN ENTIRETY.
- **Special Assessment:** The board considered a special assessment, which could be instituted by approval of 66% of the homeowners. However, this may be an unfair burden on those who are financially strapped. Also, many would refuse to pay leaving a shortfall of funds.
- **Voluntary Contributions From Community:** The Board, on behalf of the nine homeowners with properties bordering the infected area, has decided to ask the community for voluntary contributions to help defray the cost. The Board believes that there are many concerned neighbors who are sympathetic and willing to pitch in to help the community. It is hoped that a request for voluntary contributions will be effective, especially when everyone realizes that the trenching is being done for the benefit of those outside of the trenching area.

The HOA Board is recommending the following actions:

- **Use a portion of the HOA budget surplus, if approved by a majority of homeowners.**
- **Request voluntary donations from HSR neighbors. A suggested amount is \$200.**

In the near future, volunteers from the community will be contacting you to answer any questions you have about the oak wilt problem. At that time, we will ask for your vote regarding the use of the HOA budget surplus, and if you are willing and able, a voluntary contribution to help offset the trenching cost.

Please consider a generous donation to help out those in our community who have paid for the trenching effort.

Thank you for your time!

Chip Beebe

Point of Contact for Oak Wilt
Board Member, Hidden Springs Ranch Homeowners Association

Here's what you can do to reduce the chance of further oak wilt infection:

- Immediately paint all wounds on oaks to prevent contact with contaminated beetles.
- Avoid wounding of oaks between the period of Feb. 1 - June 1.
- Protect from diseases by sterilizing/sanitizing all pruning equipment between trees.
- Stop the spread of oak wilt through the roots by trenching.
- Fungicide treatment--the fungicide propiconazole (Alamo) can be used as a preventative to reduce oak wilt symptoms in live oaks when applied before infection. Fungicide injection does not stop root transmission of the oak wilt fungus.
- More...see web sites below for additional information.

For more information on oak wilt, see the following websites:

- <http://www.texasoakwilt.org/>
- <http://www.stopoakwilt.com/>