

Hidden Springs Ranch Oak Wilt Trenching

I. Problem

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.

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

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

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
- Beebe, 450 Shadywood



Oaks Infected by Oak Wilt

II. What can be done?

The following information comes from <http://www.texasoakwilt.org/>.

A. *Prevention*

- Immediately paint all wounds on oaks to prevent contact with contaminated beetles.
- Avoid wounding of oaks between the period of Feb. 1 - June 1.
- Do not transport or buy unseasoned firewood.
- Promptly remove and either burn or bury all red oaks that are dying or have been recently killed by oak wilt.
- To protect from other diseases sterilize/sanitize all pruning equipment between trees.

B. *Treatment*

There are two main recommendations that are generally given to treat oak wilt infection areas:

- **Stopping the spread through the roots by TRENCHING.**
Oak wilt centers are more easily suppressed when treated early, before they become too large. Untreated trees immediately outside the treated area should be closely monitored for several years. If the pathogen appears to have crossed the barrier, the same measures (new trenching and treatment of trees within the barrier) should be repeated while the diseased site is still small.
- **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 fungus. This treatment, therefore, is used best in conjunction with trenching or to protect individual high-value trees in situations where trenching is impractical.

III. Actions Taken to Date:

- Contacted Robert Edmonson of Texas Forest Service to inspect the area and give us an unbiased diagnosis. Mr. Edmonson confirmed without a doubt that the dead and dying trees were and are infected with Oak Wilt.
- Called a HSR community meeting (June 22) with all homeowners invited to discuss the problem with Robert Edmonson of Texas Forest Service and Paula Johnston of Oak Wilt Specialists (OWS).
- Six TRENCHING companies in the area 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.
- Application for cost sharing by State of Texas submitted; awaiting approval.

IV. Trenching

A. *Trenching Costs and Who Benefits*

- Trenching will cost ~\$15,000 (lowest quote). Additional costs may be incurred during the actual work due to broken teeth and unforeseen underground obstacles.
- The Texas Forest Service will share the cost of trenching: 40% OF TRENCHING COSTS UP TO \$1000 PER AFFECTED HOMEOWNER. This works out to be approximately \$6000.
- Cost of trenching to homeowners is ~\$9000. If those whose property borders the affected area split the bill, each will have to pay approximately \$1200.
- **Please note that the trench benefits properties outside of the trench—not those with trees inside of the trench. Thus, it is a bit unfair that those whose property borders the affected area are left to pay the bill by themselves.**
- Even with this fact, the nine homeowners whose properties border the affected area have agreed that trenching is in the best interest of the community and will pay the bill themselves if the community does not help.

B. *Funding Options*

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.

C. *Board Recommendations for Funding Options*

The HOA Board recommends the following.

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

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Voting and Voluntary Contribution Pledge Sheet

Please indicate your choices by placing your INITIALS in the space next to your choice (choose only one):

_____ **I DO WANT PART OF THE HSR HOA BUDGET SURPLUS TO BE USED TO HELP DEFRAY TRENCHING EXPENSES.** Only a portion (less than 50%) of the surplus is available to be used to offset trenching costs. The actual portion of the surplus will be determined by a HSR Board Majority vote if this option is approved by a majority of the homeowners.

_____ **I DO NOT WANT THE HSR HOA BUDGET SURPLUS TO BE USED TO DEFRAY TRENCHING EXPENSES.**

If you are personally willing to help defray the cost of trenching to help protect the property value of the entire community, please indicate the amount you are pledging below. A suggested amount is \$200. Please include your name and phone number below. THANK YOU!

Contribution Amount: _____

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Checks should be made out to: **Hidden Springs Ranch Homeowner's Association**

Checks can be collected by any Hidden Springs Ranch Board Member, or sent to:

Chip Beebe
Director, Hidden Springs Ranch HOA