How New York State Saved its Ash[1]

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Across the United States, forest communities are faced with the prospect of extirpation of *Fraxinus* (ash) species owing to mortality caused by invasion of the emerald ash borer (*Agrilus planipennis*). However, with the advancement of *ex situ* seed conservation practices, we have the opportunity to conserve the ecoregional-based genetic variability of *Fraxinus* species before they are lost from the wild. Genetic variability is critical to resistance research and to potential future reintroductions. Established in 2009 by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service (USDA FS), the Ash Genetic Resources Conservation Plan developed a seed collection protocol that maximizes genetic diversity to meet the conservation goals for these species. In 2014, the Mid-Atlantic Regional Seed Bank (MARSB) received funding from the USDA FS's Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry to train volunteers on this protocol in order to make 150 collections from the three *Fraxinus* species found in New York State. The grant period spanned 3 years to increase the program's chances of coinciding with a mast year. In 2015, a major mast year throughout the Northeast, MARSB accelerated and expanded its outreach campaign through traditional means and social media, as well as through targeted outlets such as the New York State Forest Owners Association, Partnerships for Regional Invasive Species Management, and the New York State Department of Parks. By the end of the year, we had trained over 350 workshop participants and made over 200 collections contributed by over 70 dedicated volunteers. This marks perhaps one of the most successful statewide efforts to mobilize the community to conserve a species ahead of extirpation. Furthermore, this model is easily adaptable to other states and similar efforts. This presentation will discuss the methods used to build this cadre of volunteers, where and how collections were made, and ways to expand this effort to related causes.

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