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## Hungry beetles may end season for baseball's ash bats

Published August 04, 2016

[FoxNews.com](http://FoxNews.com)



File photo - Aug 3, 2016; Phoenix, AZ, USA; Washington Nationals infielder Daniel Murphy tosses his bat as he reacts after swinging for a strike in the third inning against the Arizona Diamondbacks at Chase Field. (Mandatory Credit: Mark J. Rebilas-USA TODAY) (USA Today Sports)

Popular baseball bats may soon disappear from fields as ravenous Asian beetles rapidly consume the wood used to make them, according to reports.

American scientists say the emerald ash borers, bugs that resemble crickets, have already destroyed up to 50 million ash trees, which are used for classic bats favored by many baseball stars, NPR reported.

The invasive insects are now attacking forests in New York's Adirondack Mountains, threatening companies that rely on ash wood trees in the region, including the producer of the iconic Louisville Slugger bats.

Ash wood bats have a longstanding history in Major League Baseball. In 1951, New York Giants outfielder Bobby Thomson used one to hit the home run known as the "shot heard round the world" in a game against the Brooklyn Dodgers.

Baseball veterans including the Marlins' Ichiro Suzuki, Yankees' Alex Rodriguez and Orioles' Manny Machado are also known to have swung bats made from this disappearing material.



8 August 2016



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The Rawlings plant, a small sawmill located in Dolgeville, N.Y., has handcrafted these bats for more than a century. Manager Ron Vander Groef warned that supplies may vanish in as little as three years.

"We will not be able to make any more pro bats or retail bats or anything out of white ash because it will be gone," Groef told NPR, adding that ash is less likely to shatter than other woods.

The issue extends beyond sport -- the extinction of a tree species can have "catastrophic" effects that ripple through the entire ecosystem. As a result, officials are forbidding the movement of untreated wood in areas infested by the bugs, NPR reported.

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Richard P. Vlosky, Ph.D.  
*Director, Louisiana Forest Products Development Center*  
*Crosby Land & Resources Endowed Professor of Forest Sector Business Development*  
Room 227, School of Renewable Natural Resources  
Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA 70803  
Phone (office): (225) 578-4527; Fax: (225) 578-4251; Mobile Phone: (225) 223-1931  
Web Site: [www.LFPDC.lsu.edu](http://www.LFPDC.lsu.edu)



**President, Forest Products Society; President-Elect, WoodEMA i.a.**

