

# The US Forest Service Insect Unit in East Lansing, MI, turns 50

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There has been a USDA Forest Service Insect Unit located on the Michigan State University (MSU) campus in East Lansing, MI, since March 1956. Over the years, MSU has provided strong support for the Insect Unit, including both office and laboratory space through the Departments of Entomology and Forestry. The Unit's scientists have usually served as adjunct faculty at MSU.

The first scientist, or Research Entomologist as they're called in the USDA, was William E. Miller. Bill arrived in March 1956 and served as the Unit's Project Leader until 1964 when he was transferred to St. Paul, MN. Bill worked primarily on biology and management of the European pine shoot moth (EPSM), *Rhyacionia buoliana*, which had arrived in Michigan just a few years before. In fact, it was the arrival of the EPSM in Michigan that resulted in the initial appropriations of \$25,000 by the US Congress to start the Insect Unit in Michigan. This happened because US Congressman Gerald Ford of Grand Rapids, MI, was alerted to the concerns of local Christmas tree growers in western Lower Michigan through the West Ottawa Soil Conservation District. Gerald Ford, who later became the 38th US President, visited several EPSM-infested pine plantations. The initial research focus of the East Lansing Insect Unit was to study the biology and management of conifer-infesting insects in the Lake States. Later in 1956, Arnold T. Drooz joined the Unit, and he concentrated on the larch sawfly.

In 1956, the Insect Unit was part of the Lake States Forest Experiment Station, which included the states of Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. In 1966, the Lakes States Forest Experiment Station and Central States Forest Experiment Station



Bill Miller pruning lower branches of red pine seedlings to reduce EPSM damage in Manistee National Forest, MI - 1964.

combined to become the North Central Forest Experiment Station. The name was later changed to North Central Research Station, and just a couple of months ago in 2006 the North Central Research Station was combined with the Northeastern Research Station to become the Northern Research Station.

The Insect Unit typically developed research plans for periods of 5 years and documented these plans in what is called a Research Work Unit Description or RWUD. The title of the RWUD indicates the main research thrust of the Unit. In the 1950s and early 1960s, the Insect Unit's RWUD was entitled "Insects affecting coniferous plantations in the Lake States." Over the next few decades, the title changed only slightly to first "Insects affecting forest plantation ecosystems in the North Central States" and then to "Insects affecting forest ecosystems in the North Central States." In the 1990s, the RWUD title was "Stress effects on tree-insect-natural enemy interactions." Most recently, the Unit's RWUD title has been "Biology, ecology, and management of exotic invasive forest insects." It is interesting to note that the East Lansing Insect Unit began as a result of an exotic insect (EPSM) and now focuses almost entirely on exotic forest insects.

Below is a list of Research Entomologists who are or have been part of the East Lansing Insect Unit, and their years of service as permanent scientists stationed in East Lansing. Lou Wilson served the longest period of time in E. Lansing: 1962-1990.

Name	Years of service in East Lansing
Miller, William E.	1956-1964
Drooz, Arnold T.	1956-1957
Heikkinen, Herman J.	1958-1960
Talerico, Robert L.	1958-1961
Wilson, Louis F.	1962-1990
Kennedy, Patrick C.	1965-1969
Moore, Lincoln M.	1979-1984
Bauer, Leah S.	1982-present*
Mattson, William J.	1982-2000*
Haack, Robert A.	1986-present*
Poland, Therese M.	2001-present*

\*Leah Bauer was on educational leave for her Ph.D. program at the University of Kentucky during 1982-86. Bill Mattson was transferred to Rhinelander, WI, in 1998 but was still a member of the East Lansing Insect Unit until 2000. Bob Haack arrived in East Lansing in 1984 and worked as a post-doc in the Department of Entomology at MSU during 1984-86. Therese Poland was a US Forest Service post-doc in East Lansing during 1997-2001.

The East Lansing Insect Unit also has two employees now classified as Entomologist. They are Deborah L. Miller (1991-present) and Toby R. Petrice (1997-present).

As mentioned above, the North Central and Northeastern Research Stations were combined earlier in 2006 with the new organization called the Northern Research Station. Talks are now underway to combine several of the existing units into larger administrative units, but without physically relocating employees. These changes should occur in 2007, so stay tuned. No matter how we reorganize, we fully expect there will be USDA Forest Service entomologists on the MSU campus for many years to come.



(R-L) Congressman Gerald Ford, US Forest Service entomologist Harvey MacAloney (MN), and Clarence Reenders (Chair, West Ottawa Soil Conservation District) view EPSM damage in Michigan: ca. 1956.