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ABSTRACT

McManus, M.L. and J.R. Riddle. 1982. **The beast that ate the Northeast**. Am. Forests 88(6): 22-27, 60-63.

With a century of research behind us, we have many registered insecticides, and we have the programs necessary to back control efforts. But we also have more regulations, more awareness of the environment effects of certain controls, and more experts offering varied advice. In the balance we are left with a problem maybe more difficult than the one faced by Victorian counterparts. In reality the struggle is not only with the moth but also with the issues surrounding its control. Should we spray or not? Who should finance the research and control programs — federal, state, or local government, or the private sector? Is it better to use chemical or biological controls? Can our efforts have any effect, or should we let the moth run its natural course? Do we know too much or too little? Last year the gypsy moth defoliated more than 12.8 million acres of woodland. Hardwoods respond to losing more than 50 to 60 percent of their leaves by re-foliating in mid-summer, using buds earmarked for next year's growth. This creates a drain on a tree's energy supply. Healthy trees can survive several defoliations. But weak trees, or those that face unfavorable moisture conditions after defoliation, are in serious trouble. Homeowners are often relieved when their trees re-foliate, but then are dismayed when those trees die two to five years later. They overlook the fact that weakened trees are easy prey for organisms such as the two-lined chestnut borer or shoestring root rot fungus. In the forest, figures show that oak mortality ranges from 6 to 70 percent on certain sites over a five-year period.