The ash tree is a very important tree in Vermont’s landscape. Ash have beautiful diamond shaped bark patterns and they stand out in a forest due to their tall and straight lines. To me, ash trees are iconic. They makes the green mountains green in the spring and summer, and turn to vivid orange hues in the fall. My dad and I find morel mushrooms growing the nitrogen rich soil at the base of our ash trees. They are known for having great, full tops, and bring good value in the timber market. Birds love ash trees because they are high enough to keep away predators, and deer rely on ash trees as they eat the buds off the young tops in the winter.

Due to their efficient speed of growth, ash trees cause maple trees to grow taller in a forest. As they compete for sunlight, maple trees fight among the ash to expand their own growth and reach for the sunlight. As a result, maple tree within a hardwood forest to grow taller than they normally would without the ash. Taller, bigger maple trees bring higher timber values which help loggers, foresters and land owners.

Due to the recent discovery of the emerald ash borer in Vermont, I am worried that these beautiful trees will slowly die. If ash disappears, the impact to maple trees is next. You may think “why should I care, it’s just a tree?” Well that tree makes furniture, doors, architectural sculptures, cabinets and wood paneling.

The invasion of the emerald ash borer has caused scientists to look for ways to prevent the spread of the beetle beyond its current habitat. Scientists are making some headway in discovering ways to prevent the ongoing spread of this invasive ash executioner. For example, if the emerald ash borer experiences temperatures lower than -30F they will be completely wiped out.

If we don’t act fast, the green mountains might turn from green, to green spotted. The places where trees once were, will be open fields or big buildings. With continued education and support, we can keep the state’s percentage of open land to forest at its current 20% open and 80% forested land. The ash tree is a beautiful tree that should be saved and conserved to help Vermont’s wildlife and economy.

(Robertson, March 2019)