

From a shelter to 'Oz'

Rescue dog Murphy is a scene-stealer as Toto in touring production of 'The Wizard of Oz.' **RHODE ISLANDER, F1**



Did you fall back?

Daylight saving time ended overnight. Did you set your clocks back one hour?



Providence Sunday Journal

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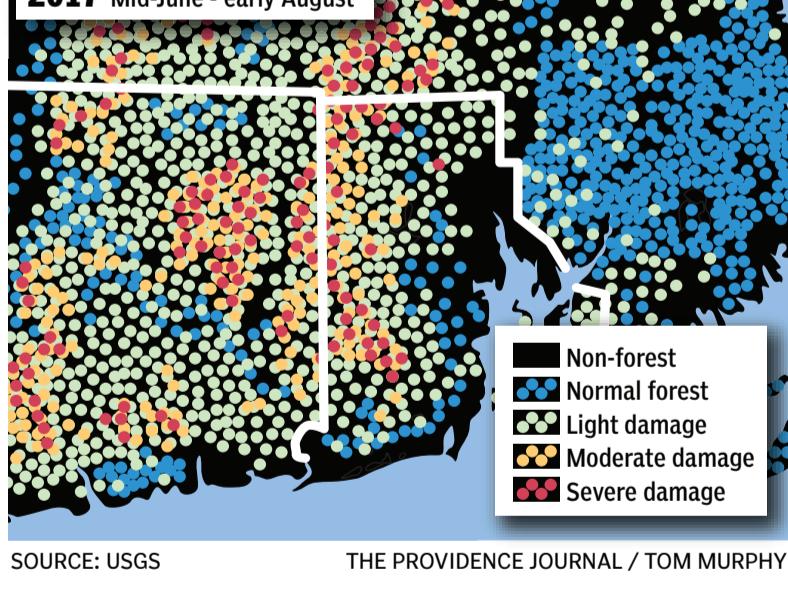
TREES UNDER SIEGE

Prolonged assault by insects and drought has devastated R.I.'s oaks and other hardwoods, altering the forest ecosystem



William Walker, supervising forester with the R.I. Department of Environmental Management, points out dead trees at Richmond's Hillsdale Preserve Management Area. The spot where he stands was shaded by a thick canopy of leaves before a multi-year infestation by gypsy moth caterpillars and other insects killed numerous oaks and other hardwoods. [THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL / BOB BREIDENBACH]

Gypsy moth tree damage



SOURCE: USGS

THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL / TOM MURPHY

By Alex Kuffner
Journal Staff Writer

RICHMOND — Everywhere William Walker looks, he sees dead oaks.

They stand around him, 30 and 40 feet tall, leafless and gray, each marked with a dab of blue paint, signaling that they need to be cut down.

In just the small patch of forest that encircles Walker within the Hillsdale Preserve Management Area, there must be at least two dozen in his field of vision. Walker, supervising forester with the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, estimates that there are thousands more in other parts of the 1,825-acre state-owned preserve.

"Dead oak, dead oak, dead oak, dead oak," Walker says, as if reciting

SEE TREES, A14

CAMPAIGN 2018

Crunching the data on R.I.'s electorate

A look at the top names, birth years, affiliations

By Paul Edward Parker
Journal Staff Writer

What's more popular: Raimondo or Fung? Or Trillo, for that matter?

This isn't a question about whether candidates of those names will carry the day in the governor's race on Tuesday. It's a question of whether those names themselves are more numerous among the 789,372 registered voters who will pick the winners on Election Day.

The Providence Journal analyzed the Rhode Island voter database maintained by the secretary of state's office, gleaning information about which political parties are most popular in different parts of the state, when registered voters were born and which names are most common.

The Journal found that women apparently outnumber men by a wide margin on the voter list. A total

SEE ELECTORATE, A19

COURTS

Lawyer sees vindication in fraud case

By Katie Mulvaney
Journal Staff Writer

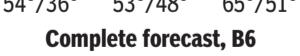
PROVIDENCE — Cranston lawyer Robert McNelis and his supporters for months attested that it was an alleged con man who alone stole his firm's checkbook and spent \$7,000-plus in clients' money.

And last month, the state attorney general's office agreed to dismiss multiple charges against McNelis, including conspiracy and soliciting others to commit crimes, after his alleged co-conspirator and key witness for the prosecution was arrested in Florida amid new allegations that he scammed some \$39,500 in cash from an auto dealership where he was working under a fictitious name.

The police in Chiefland, Florida, on Sept. 9 arrested Marcus Crook — who was known to his employer as Marcus

SEE FRAUD, A8

TODAY MON TUE



54°/36° 53°/48° 65°/51°

Complete forecast, B6

ARTS

ENTERTAINMENT

TREES

From Page A1

a grim chant. "You look through the woods and you just see blue."

This is the legacy of a combination of environmental factors that has at its center the infestation of gypsy moth caterpillars that ravaged forests in Rhode Island, Connecticut and Massachusetts over three successive summers, from 2015 to 2017. The damage doubled each year, peaking at more than 1 million acres, about a third of them in Rhode Island.

The defoliation was compounded by a prolonged drought that starved woodlands of nourishment; coincident outbreaks of other leaf-eating caterpillars; and an ongoing attack by boring beetles that prey on weakened trees.

As much as a quarter of Rhode Island's forest trees may be dead, according to the DEM.

The devastation is so bad it can be seen from space. NASA's Earth Observatory posted satellite images of the caterpillars' impact.

Look at before-and-after aerial images of the western part of Rhode Island, which was hit hardest, and you'll see vast swaths of brown that once were green.

On the ground, the effect is even more striking. Stand deep inside an oak forest in a place like this in northern Richmond, and there is open sky where there should be a thick canopy of leaves.

"Nuclear winter," mutters Walker.

The gypsy moth is an invasive species that has spread throughout the Northeast since the first individuals brought over from Europe escaped from a failed silk-weaving experiment in Massachusetts in 1869.

Its numbers are kept in check most years by a fungus and a virus that are fatal to the caterpillars that emerge each spring from egg masses laid by female moths the previous summer. But periodically, if conditions are just right, the voracious caterpillars will flourish and decimate oak trees that offer their preferred meal, as well as other hardwoods and sometimes even pines.

Everything came together for the caterpillars three years ago. An unusually dry spring meant that spores of the caterpillar-killing fungus *Entomophaga maimaiga* couldn't germinate and spread the way they normally would. In the absence of the fungus, the nucleopolyhedrosis virus, NPV, a nasty thing that turns caterpillars into disease-delivering zombies, couldn't take hold.

More caterpillars that spring meant more moths that summer. They laid more eggs than usual, so the infestation was only worse in 2016. There were so many caterpillars that their chewing and their droppings could be heard when you entered a forest, like white noise from a TV.

The cycle repeated itself in 2017 before the rains finally came, creating the wet conditions favorable for *E. maimaiga* and, subsequently, NPV, which together all but wiped out the caterpillars.

In the same years that the gypsy moth larvae flourished, forest tent caterpillars and eastern tent caterpillars, both species native to the region, also thrived, adding to the damage.

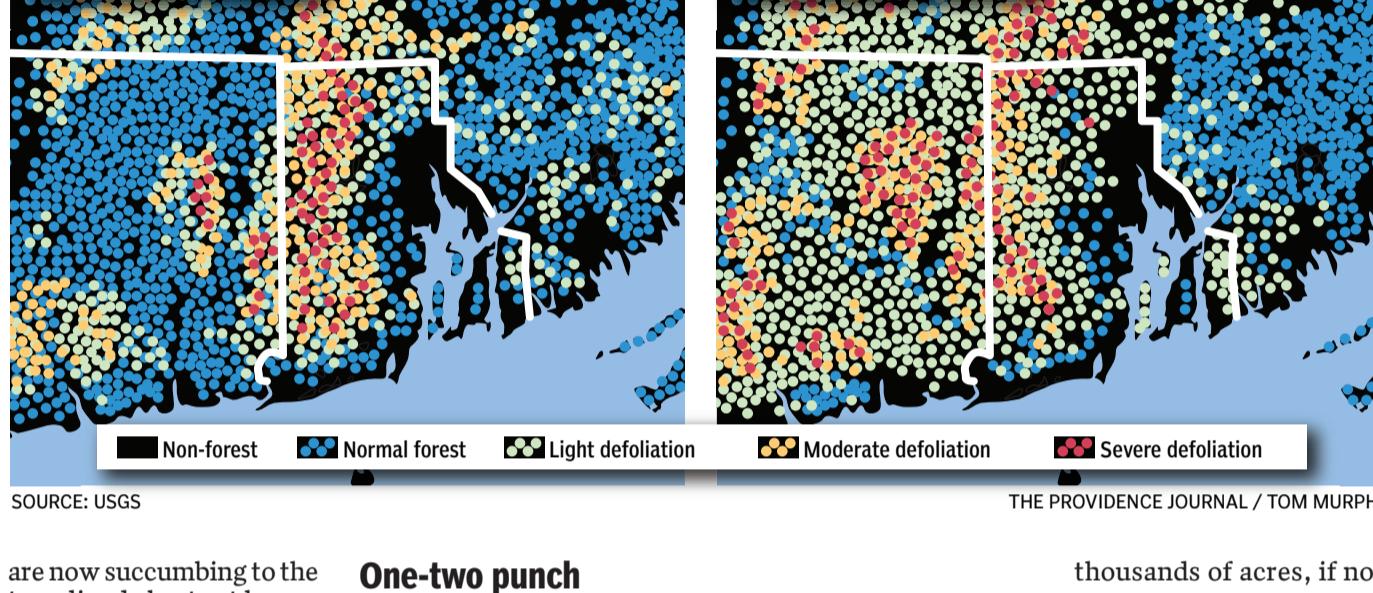
Trees can often survive defoliation by budding new leaves, but successive years of damage will gradually weaken them to the point that they can no longer recover. Drought makes it even harder by depriving them of much-needed nourishment.

Many of the trees that did survive the caterpillars



Blue paint marks the dead trees slated for removal at the Hillsdale Preserve Management Area in Richmond. Dead trees pose a fire hazard in the event of a lightning strike. [THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL / BOB BREIDENBACH]

Gypsy moth tree damage



SOURCE: USGS

THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL / TOM MURPHY

are now succumbing to the two-lined chestnut borer, also a native species, which is attracted to weakened trees by the airborne chemicals they give off.

The borer tunnels through the bark of the failing trees, which can no longer put up defenses against them, and lays eggs that, when hatched, release larvae that feed on the inner cambium layer, the soft tissue of the trunk that is growing.

Trees that appeared healthy and leafed out this past summer suddenly started dying, adding to the overall ruin. Heather Faubert, research associate at the University of Rhode Island's Plant Protection Clinic, inspected some of the affected trees with Walker.

"He peeled the bark back, and we found them riddled with trails," she says.

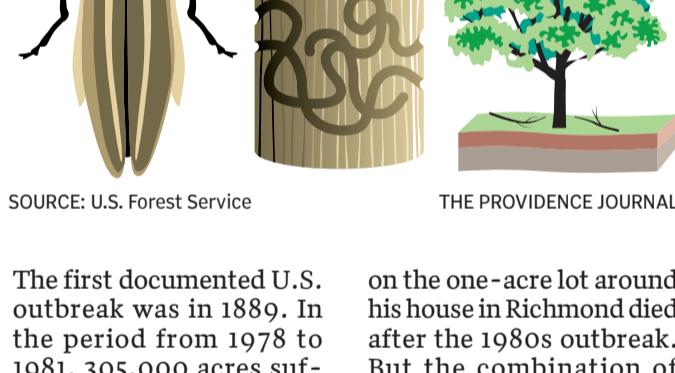
In one sign of the beetle's proliferation, the number of chestnut borers caught in a trap maintained by Lisa Tewksbury, manager of the university's Biocontrol Lab, went from fewer than 10 in 2014 to nearly 300 this year.

There have been other years of defoliation caused by gypsy moth caterpillars.

One-two punch

The two-lined chestnut borer is attracted to trees already weakened by disease or infestation by other insects. They fly into the defoliated forest and finish it off.

- 1 The adult beetle lays its eggs in the crevices of the tree bark.
- 2 When the pupae hatch, they begin boring U-shaped paths into the nutrient-carrying layer beneath the bark.
- 3 Once the trunk is ringed, the tree begins dying from the top down.



SOURCE: U.S. Forest Service

THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL

The first documented U.S. outbreak was in 1889. In the period from 1978 to 1981, 305,000 acres suffered damage. As recently as 1985, 411,800 acres in Rhode Island were affected.

In that context, the recent infestation was the worst in a generation, says Richard Casagrande, emeritus professor of entomology at the University of Rhode Island.

Frank Golet, emeritus professor of ecology at URI, says that none of the trees

on the one-acre lot around his house in Richmond died after the 1980s outbreak. But the combination of gypsy moth caterpillars, forest tent caterpillars and drought killed many trees this time around. He has had 16 oaks and pines removed so far, but other dead trees remain.

The DEM is finalizing the total area of tree mortality, but Paul Ricard, forest health program coordinator for the agency, says it amounts to tens of

thousands of acres, if not 100,000 acres.

The sheer number of dead trees stands out compared with past defoliations, says Faubert.

"I was here in the 1980s, and I don't remember this type of death," she says.

Each step Walker takes through the Hillsdale Preserve is audible as he crunches over broken branches that have fallen to the forest floor.

"If it were a windier day, we'd be wearing hardhats," he says.

He's documented more than 90 percent mortality of trees over about 100 acres spread around the preserve, but there is more damage throughout the rest of the property.

The trees have to be removed because they pose a fire hazard. With so much dead wood, a lightning strike could set off a forest fire that could spread to nearby homes.

The DEM is selling the dead oaks for firewood, but the proceeds are a fraction of what the state could get if the trees were still alive, weren't rotting, and could be harvested as high-quality lumber: \$24,000 versus what Walker estimates

would be at least \$300,000.

He and an assistant spent three weeks surveying the Hillsdale forest and marking trees to be taken down. Walker has plans to clear trees on a couple of other DEM properties, including one in Hopkinton, but there are many others that he hasn't gotten to yet. He is the sole forester doing this type of management for 64,000 acres of state land.

The agency isn't alone in struggling to deal with all the dead trees. Tree services are getting more calls to deal with dead oaks, and lumber mills are being inundated with cheap wood.

"I am seeing increased business, but I wish I wasn't, because it makes me sad," says Robert Swanson, owner of New England Portable Sawmill, who was on his way to a property in Richmond with a number of dead trees when he spoke.

Kaiser Tree Preservation, of Exeter, has been called to homes in northern Richmond surrounded by 50 or 75 dead oaks that need to be removed.

"Their yards are completely circumferenced by oaks," says company owner Ames Kaiser. "Not a single live tree left."

Towns in the hard-hit corridor from Westerly to Burrillville, which can't risk leaving dead trees along roadsides where they will eventually fall, are facing removal costs that could easily climb into six digits.

Scott Barber, Department of Public Works director in Richmond, thought he was being proactive by setting aside \$25,000 in the current budget to take down hazardous trees along the town's roads. He is now working with the Town Council to find another \$75,000 to cover the costs of bringing in additional tree crews.

His department usually cuts down four or five dead trees a year. Since July 1, crews have felled 125 trees and found about another 800 that need to go, Barber says. And those are only the trees along roads.

"We keep finding more and more," Barber says. "Nobody anticipated it getting to this level."

Chris Rooney, lead forestry supervisor for National Grid in Rhode Island, compares the wave of destruction to the impact of Dutch elm disease, which killed off most of New England's elms starting in the 1940s.

In a typical year, National Grid removes about 1,400 hazard trees in the state that are threatening power lines, at a total cost of roughly \$1 million. The company estimates that in a typical year, about 350 of those trees are dead. This year, it will spend more than \$1.25 million just on dead trees. The company has already taken down 550, and in a joint project with the Rhode Island Department of Transportation, it has identified at least another 1,600 as hazards to the wires.

But that list only includes trees on state roads. National Grid is starting to work with cities and towns to figure out the best way to deal with all the dead trees on secondary roads throughout Rhode Island before any winter storms hit that will take them down. Rooney is meeting with public works directors in the affected communities on Nov. 14.

"It's a race against time," Rooney says. "Gravity is going to win sooner or later."

Outbreaks of pests and diseases are the major force behind forest disturbances in North America, having a wider effect than even wildfire. A 2001 study by Oak Ridge National Laboratory and the U.S. Forest



A dead oak lies toppled at the Hillsdale Preserve Management Area in Richmond. [THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL / BOB BREIDENBACH]

TREES

From Page A14

Service estimated the total area affected by insects and pathogens to be 45 times larger than fire, with an economic impact five times as great.

Scientists expect these infestations to only worsen with climate change. A recent report from the Forest Service lists rising temperatures and drought as major factors that will stress trees and make them more susceptible to insects like gypsy moths.

Milder winters will also aid in the survival of other tree-eating insects, such as the southern pine beetle and the emerald ash borer, both species found for the first time in Rhode Island in recent years.

Over the last 15 years, the Rhode Island Tree Council has documented higher air temperatures, higher soil temperatures — which lead to greater evaporation — and less summer rainfall in the state. Oaks are just the first native species to suffer, says John Campanini, technical director to the council.

"I believe it's going to spread to other species — red maple, sugar maple — as we go forward," he says.

The Forest Service predicts a long-term decline in oak density in the region. The current die-off will have a lasting effect on the forests of western Rhode Island. In parts of the Hillsdale forest where oak dominated, black birch is the only type of tree left standing. With the oaks that shaded them gone, the birches will have abundant sunlight and for a time will become the dominant species.

In the Francis Carter Memorial Preserve, in Charlestown, there are now patches of grassland where there used to be thick forest, Faubert says. The defoliation has been devastating, but she is still optimistic.

"Our forests are going to grow back," she says. "There are areas with a lot of death, but things are growing up behind it."

But other parts of the forest ecosystem could be affected in the meantime, such as turkeys and deer that rely on acorns as a food source. Rabbits and other small animals that use foliage for protection could be more vulnerable. Nesting birds will move out and woodpeckers will move in.

And the chances of new oaks growing in will be diminished by deer that feed on saplings.

URI's Casagrande warns of broad consequences of so much defoliation. He points to the infestations in the late 1970s and 1980s, which may have helped lead to the spread of ticks in the region.

"Throughout much of the state this opened up the forest canopy, facilitating growth of greenbriar and other deer browse," he says. "This is in large part responsible for the enormous increase in deer populations and very likely the buildup of Lyme disease in our area."

There is so much death in the Hillsdale forest that each oak that is still alive is notable.

Walker hopes that the living trees will produce plenty of acorns that will start to repopulate the forest.

He walks down a slope toward the Beaver River. The landscape is lusher here, because there's more moisture in the ground. There aren't as many dead trees as in the drier upland areas, but this part of the forest still hasn't escaped unscathed.

"Oh, really?" Walker exclaims, spotting a northern red oak that has died since he last went through here. "That sucks."

It's just one of a number of trees that was alive when Walker surveyed the forest this past summer. But in just a few months, the trees have given in, weakened by drought, caterpillars and, now, beetles.

"It's a little depressing to be out here today," he says.

— akuffner@providencejournal.com, (401) 277-7457
On Twitter: @KuffnerAlex

KENNEDY AUCTION

Memorabilia includes Newport-related items

Newport Daily News

NEWPORT — A curated selection of John F. Kennedy-related items is being auctioned off by Boston-based RR Auction to mark the upcoming 55th anniversary of his assassination on Nov. 22, 1963.

Interested buyers will have the opportunity to bid on items such as a signed photo from the Kennedys' Sept. 12, 1953, wedding in Newport, a bronze altar gate and his bomber jacket.

The photo is a vintage, matte-finish photo of the Kennedys slicing their wedding cake as they played host to more than 1,200 guests at the Bouvier family's Hammersmith Farm on Harrison Avenue. It is inscribed with a fountain pen, "For the Ken Brownes, With every good wish, John Kennedy" and "Jacqueline Kennedy." The photo is estimated to fetch \$8,000.

"John and Jackie are rare in dual-signed photos, and this image is the first of its kind we've ever seen," said Bobby Livingston, executive vice president at RR Auction, in a prepared statement.

The bronze altar gate was custom-made for St. Mary's Church, where John and Jacqueline Kennedy stood and exchanged marriage vows. The gate is heavy and features filigree ornamentation along the top. The



A photograph of the Kennedys cutting their wedding cake is up for auction.

frame has two thick bronze hinges on one side and six mounting holes along the rail.

The gate is estimated to sell for \$5,000 or more.

Other auction items include an original glossy photo of John and Jackie Kennedy posing with the groom's side of the wedding party at Hammersmith Farm and a handwritten letter by JFK to his friend Richard Flood in Newport. The undated letter was probably written in March 1944, eight months after the sinking of PT-109, the torpedo boat Kennedy commanded that was cut in half in the Pacific by a Japanese destroyer,

killing two crew members. In the letter, estimated to be worth around \$6,000, Kennedy makes reference to his older brother, Joseph P. Kennedy Jr., who was flying missions in Europe and would be killed five months later.

In addition, Kennedy's dark brown leather G-1 Bomber jacket is expected to sell for around \$150,000. The jacket, manufactured by L.W. Foster Sportswear for the USN Bureau of Aeronautics, is a size 44 and features flap pockets, a fur collar and an embroidered patch of the presidential seal. The jacket was recovered from the Honey Fitz, the former presidential yacht.

Also up for auction is a matted, framed collection of handwritten notes and doodles by JFK from the night before his assassination on stationery from the Rice Hotel in Houston with an image of the Kennedys at Love Field in Dallas. The piece is estimated to fetch at least \$10,000.

The owners of the items are a number of different consignors who wish to remain anonymous, the auction firm said.

The Fine Autographs and Artifacts auction is ongoing and will conclude Wednesday, Nov. 7. Interested buyers can register on the RR auction website and bid online.

For more information, visit [rrauction.com](#).

POLICE

State police ID driver killed in Rte. 95 rollover

By Paul Edward Parker
Journal Staff Writer

RICHMOND — The state police on Saturday identified the driver who died and a passenger who was injured in a rollover crash on Route 95 on Friday night.

Igor Nadtochij, 49, of 89 Alpine Place, Franklin, Massachusetts, lost control of his car at about 8:40 p.m.

while traveling south about two miles north of exit 3. His car went off the road, came back, struck another car and rolled over, bursting into flames, according to state police spokeswoman Laura Meade Kirk. Nadtochij was ejected from his car. He was pronounced dead at the scene.

His passenger, Kimora Hodge, 35, of the same address, was also ejected from the car. She was taken to Rhode Island Hospital, where she was admitted with injuries that were described as not life-threatening.

The driver of the car struck by Nadtochij's vehicle, Frederick Steindler, 40, of New York City, was not injured.

The southbound lanes of the highway were completely closed for about half an hour after the crash, when one lane was reopened. All lanes were open by 11 p.m.

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