

NEWS FROM MAJORITY LEADER

ROB CALARCO



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LEGISLATOR CALARCO INTRODUCES LEGISLATION TO COMBAT SOUTHERN PINE BEETLE

JOINT COMMISSION WILL ADDRESS GROWING INFESTATION IN SUFFOLK COUNTY



Tunnels left by adult southern pine beetles under bark. (Photo by NYS DEC)

RIVERHEAD, NY – Suffolk County Majority Leader and Legislator Rob Calarco introduced legislation at yesterday's General Session to form a Joint Commission to combat the southern pine beetle. The legislation, IR 1387-2015 "Establishing a Southern Pine Beetle Joint Commission," brings together multiple levels of government and regulatory agencies to draw up an action plan to deal with the infestation.

The southern pine beetle's presence has been expanding along the eastern seaboard in recent years. During the late 1990s the pest caused over \$1 billion in damage to the timber industry in the southeast United States. An

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infestation was first noticed in late September 2014 Suffolk County and more outbreaks have since been reported.

“This issue is catastrophic for Long Island’s pine trees,” stated Legislator Calarco. “And those pine trees are essential for the protection of our drinking water. The health of our entire ecosystem is threatened by these insects and we need to act before the damage is irreparable.”

The eleven-member joint commission will include the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, the County Executive, the Parks and Environment and Planning Departments, the Pine Barrens Commission, the Suffolk County Water Authority, the Presiding Officer of the County Legislature and representatives from the Towns of Southampton, Islip, Brookhaven and Riverhead. If other townships and municipalities request to be added to the commission, the legislation can be amended to reflect their interest.

Once the adult southern pine beetle enters into the bark it disrupts the flow of nutrients. Though the beetles are only 2-4mm in length, they can kill a tree within 2-4 months. While all pine trees are susceptible, pitch pines are the preferred tree species on Long Island.

“My intent is not only to bring affected parties around the table but to develop an action plan that details the responsibilities of each entity,” said Legislator Calarco. “Resources are stretched so thin and in this emergency situation every minute and dollar counts.”

The bill will be discussed at the Environment, Planning and Agriculture Committee on Monday, May 4. If it is approved in committee, the resolution will be on the agenda at the May 12 General Session in Hauppauge.

Majority Leader Rob Calarco represents the 7th Legislative District which includes Patchogue, East Patchogue, North Patchogue, Medford and Gordon Heights. Smaller portions of Blue Point, Bellport, Middle Island Fire Island are also included in the District. He is Chairman of the Government Operations, Personnel, Housing & Consumer Protection committee, Vice Chairman of the Public Safety Committee, as well as a member of the Health Committee and the Ways & Means Committee of the Suffolk County Legislature.