



Forest Health Protection, Southern Region

TEXAS LEAFCUTTING ANT,

Atta texana (Buckley)

Importance. - The Texas leafcutting ant, or town ant, is a serious pest of pine regeneration in the upland areas of west central Louisiana and east Texas. It does not occur in other forested areas across the South.

Identifying the Insect. - Leafcutting ants are rust colored with large heads. They live in large colonies. The queen is 3/4 inch (18 mm) long, and lives in an underground chamber. The worker ants are most numerous and range in size from 1/10 to 1/2 inches (3 to 12 mm) long. Ant nests consist of numerous crescent-shaped mounds on the surface and extensive underground passageways and chambers. The mounds may be restricted to a small area or extend over an acre or more. Foraging trails cleared of vegetation are often present around the central town area.



Adult worker.

Identifying the injury. - Leafcutting ants will attack hundreds of plant species. They damage all species of southern yellow pine by removing the needles, buds, and bark of seedlings during the winter and early spring when other green vegetation is unavailable. This is when large

accreages of pine regeneration can be killed around leafcutting ant colonies. Once the seedlings have reached the height of 2 to 3 feet, they are rarely killed by leafcutting ants.

Biology. - The ants have a mating flight in May or June. After mating, the females establish nests beneath the soil and become the queens of the colonies. Worker ants carry the cut foliage and other vegetative material back to the nest, where it is used to culture the fungus that is their primary food.

Control. - There are few natural enemies. Control can be attained by fumigating the nest.
