FACT versus *Fiction*

Sudden Oak Death in California

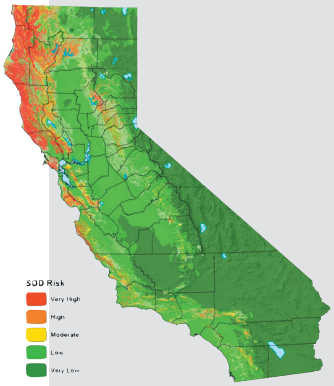
California Oak Mortality Task Force

Here are five common misconceptions about Sudden Oak Death and the pathogen that causes it, *Phytophthora ramorum*.

Sudden Oak Death and *Phytophthora ramorum* are native to California.

Phytophthora ramorum is not native to California, nor has it been around for decades or centuries. Scientists are not sure where the pathogen came from, but genetic studies have established that it did not originate in California. Instead, data show that it is a relatively new introduction, probably brought here in the 1980s or 1990s.

Sudden Oak Death has "run its course."



Epidemiologists predict that the next wet winters and springs, when they come, will facilitate continued extensive spread of *P. ramorum*, especially in the north coast of California. A new series of models, based on observations of past pathogen spread of the pathogen and randomized weather patterns, show that the pathogen has the potential to spread much more within the 14 infested counties, as well as into parts of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. These predictions are based partially on the incidence of wet weather that is favorable to pathogen spread, and the prevalence and distribution of bay laurel and tanoak trees, two primary hosts for pathogen transmission.

For scientific references, see the *Phytophthora ramorum* Bibliography and Sudden Oak Death Literature Summary at www.suddenoakdeath.org.

The disease is spread from one infected oak to another.

In California, true oaks (*Quercus* species) do not appear to play an important role in the spread of the pathogen to other trees or plants; instead, foliar infections on bay laurel are mostly responsible for contagion of oaks. Tanoak twigs and many ornamental plants can also be infectious. Avoid moving plants and plant materials, especially twigs and leaves, out of infested areas.

Green trees are always safe and healthy trees.

If a tree has Sudden Oak Death, it may become prone to structural failure even BEFORE the browning of the crown, i.e., while still appearing "healthy." In areas where Sudden Oak Death is present, carefully monitor the trunks of oaks and tanoaks that may represent a hazard to people and property. Symptoms such as bleeding cankers, fungal charcoal-black globes growing on the bark, and sawdust produced by beetles are indications that the tree is dying and may be unstable, though even these external signs may not always be visible.

Healthy oak and tanoak trees will fight off this infection on their own.

Because of the exotic nature of *P. ramorum* in North America, we cannot depend on natural resistance to protect California plants from the pathogen. It is necessary to actively combat the disease. There are scientifically recognized PREVENTIVE treatments available for individual trees, and larger-scale strategies for pathogen management are currently being studied.

You can learn more about *Phytophthora ramorum* and Sudden Oak Death at the website of the California Oak Mortality Task Force, www.suddenoakdeath.org. There you'll find complete information about the disease and steps you can take to prevent pathogen spread.