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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:  
LOSING ANOTHER PIECE OF THE COAST'S NATURAL HERITAGE**

**Sewanee, Tenn.**—In a new study just published in the journal *Biological Invasions*, ecologists at Sewanee: The University of the South document the loss of yet another major tree species from North American forests.

Redbay (*Persea borbonia*) joins the ranks of chestnut, hemlock, and American elm as a tree whose populations have been decimated by the introduction of an exotic disease called laurel wilt.

Redbay, a member of the avocado family, was once a dominant species in southeastern coastal forests and served as the primary host plant for species such as the palamedes swallowtail butterfly.

Lead researcher Jon Evans and his colleagues were among the first in the country to begin tracking the ecological consequences of laurel wilt on redbay. This disease is caused by an Asian beetle, *Xyleborus glabratus*, that bores within the tree and spreads a pathogenic fungus.

The six-year study was conducted on the coast of Georgia and tracked the elimination of redbay trees from forests where it was once very abundant.

The researchers uncovered a unique twist to the fate of the tree species. “Despite redbay’s prolific sprouting ability,” Evans says, “high levels of browse from white-tailed deer is preventing new trees from becoming established and accelerating its demise.”

The authors suspect that given its former abundance, the loss of redbay will likely have far-reaching implications for biodiversity in coastal forest ecosystems of the southeastern United States.

“Sadly, we’ve lost yet another piece of our country’s natural heritage due to the introduction of exotic species,” said co-author Brett Scheffers of James Cook University.

Sewanee: The University of the South, familiarly known as Sewanee, comprises a nationally recognized College of Arts and Sciences and a distinguished School of Theology. Located on 13,000 acres in Tennessee’s Cumberland Plateau, Sewanee enrolls 1,600 undergraduates and approximately 100 seminarians. For more information about Sewanee: The University of the South, visit [www.sewanee.edu](http://www.sewanee.edu).