

Good morning Neil.

Thanks for your tireless efforts to remove English Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) from our community.

And thanks, also, for highlighting the problem of 'dead zones' around holly trees. I'm concerned about these 'dead zones' for two reasons: aboveground, and belowground.

Aboveground, an ecosystem's biological diversity and stability depends, in part, on its species diversity. In a forest stand with 'dead zones', plant species diversity and richness is reduced. And so is the diversity of species that depend upon that plant - including insect species, and microbial species. That's a problem.

Additionally, by altering the aboveground plant species diversity, 'dead zones' fundamentally change belowground ecosystems. There's a good recent review of these belowground ecosystems and their linkages to the aboveground plant community here:

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0378112723000816>

Plants represent the major input of energy (carbohydrates) and other materials to belowground ecosystems. When these plants are removed - e.g., in holly 'dead zones' - belowground ecosystems are disrupted, with unknown consequences. Removing holly, and allowing 'dead zones' to recover to native plant communities, will have the effect of restoring aboveground and, presumably, belowground communities.

Thanks again, Neil, for the good work you and associates have done in holly removal so far. And the best of luck in future efforts - it's important work.

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