



Black Hills National Forest

U.S. Forest Service

Rocky Mountain Region



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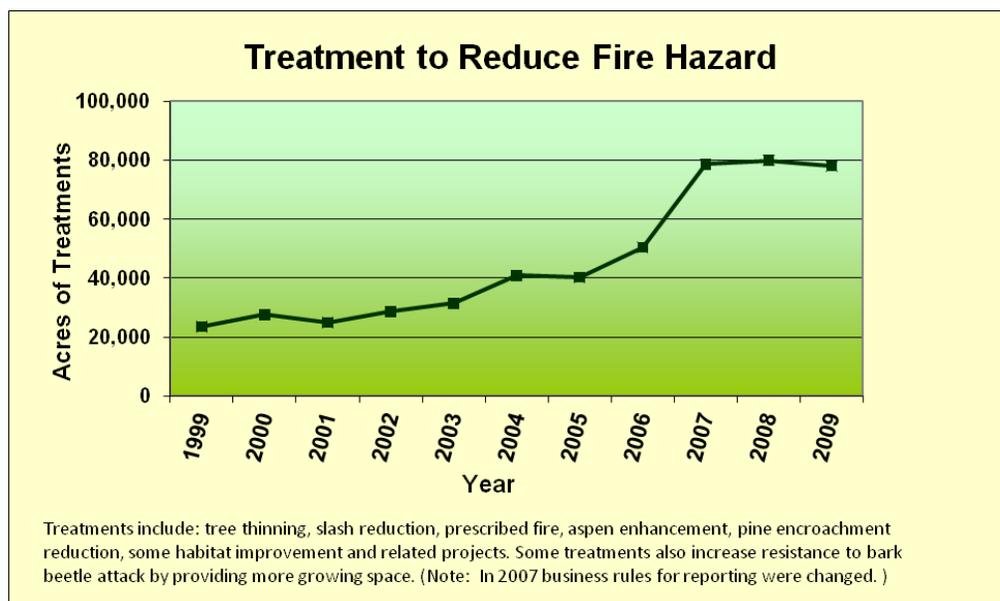
Bark Beetles and Healthy Forests

Background

- The Black Hills National Forest encompasses 1.5 million acres including 300,000 acres of intermixed non-federal lands. Much of the 1.2 million acres of National Forest System land is within the wildland-urban interface surrounding at-risk-communities.
- 1 million acres are forested with ponderosa pine (700,000 acres are high insect and fire hazard), the balance includes grassland, spruce, aspen and other hardwoods.
- Ponderosa pine evolved with a fire frequency of about 11-40 years burning 40,000-50,000 acres annually. These fires thinned trees, reduced insects and diseases, cycled nutrients and provided diverse habitat.
- Nearly 1,000 wildfires burned over 180,000 acres of National Forest System lands since 2000. About 97% are extinguished when small. 10-12 large fires consumed most acres.
- Mountain pine beetles have affected an estimated 370,000 acres of ponderosa pine in the last 10 years.
- Beetles have erupted around Beaver Park, Deerfield Reservoir, Bugtown Gulch, Upper Spring Creek, Bear Mountain, Medicine Mountain Boy Scout Camp, Hill City, Custer Peak, Norbeck Wildlife Preserve, Black Elk Wilderness, Custer State Park and Mt. Rushmore National Memorial.

Forest Treatment

The Forest Service has moved aggressively to implement projects to reduce susceptibility to bark beetle attack, reduce fire hazard, and improve tree growth, diversity, range condition and wildlife habitat. Most projects are tree thinning and prescribed burning. Because of the significant overcrowding of trees several treatments are needed on an acre to meet objectives.



The Forest Service completes 70-80,000 acres of treatment annually. Of that, timber sales on about 20,000 acres annually provide the most cost effective means to thin over-crowded forests and reduce beetle and fire risk while supporting the local economy. The volume of timber sold is within projections and objectives made in the Land and Resource Management Plan.

These projects result in many large piles of woody biomass that under current market and budget conditions are burned. The Forest Service is seeking ways to utilize this material and to reduce atmospheric emissions and noxious weed establishment.

Further information: U.S. Forest Service, Black Hills National Forest at 605-673-9200.