



Cooperation Brings Results

Through the Spruce Bark Beetle Task Force the Forest Service, Alaska Division of Forestry and State boroughs are working together to deal with the impacts of a ten year insect infestation on the Kenai Peninsula.



More than 4 million acres of spruce forest in south central Alaska have sustained heavy mortality caused by spruce bark beetle infestation.

Since 1990 the spruce forests of south-central Alaska have been dramatically affected by the spruce bark beetle. In 1996 active statewide infestation peaked at 1.1 million acres. The result is substantial spruce forest mortality on over 4 million acres of mixed ownership forestland, with 1.2 million of those acres on the Kenai Peninsula.

In 1998 Congress directed the Forest Service to “establish, in cooperation with the Kenai and other affected boroughs, a multi-party task force to prepare an action plan to manage spruce bark beetle infestations in Alaska and rehabilitate the infested areas.”

Getting Started

Prior to the Congressional direction, the Alaska Region of the Forest Service, through its State and Private Forestry (S&PF) program, conducted a state and federal interagency meeting to determine a coordinated course of action for addressing the bark beetle epidemic. Afterwards, this group was reconvened with the Kenai Borough Mayor to discuss how the effort should proceed.

A task force was established, chaired by the Mayor, that included 10 multi-interest stakeholder representatives and six state and federal agency advisors. It was decided that there would be full agreement by everyone for any recommended action, and that the public would be kept informed by inviting the media and by holding several “town” meetings. It was also agreed the process would be professionally facilitated.

Outcomes

Consensus was reached that the first priority was wildfire risk and public safety. Meetings and work sessions were held over a 5 month period, resulting in the identification of over 50 long and short-term consensus projects requiring over \$13,000,000 in funding. An Action Plan was developed and delivered to Congress. A story about the process was also published in American Forests magazine.

Forest Service Support

In 1996 S&PF partnered with the Alaska Division of Forestry and granted **\$34,000 to the community of Homer** to conduct public education regarding the beetle situation within that community. Involvement of Task Force members in this earlier program helped set the stage for informed public participation in the Task Force process.

The Forest Service **facilitated timely granting of the funding**

available (\$500,000) to run the process, which was completed for about \$100,000 cost. The Forest Service then facilitated the clearance and reprogramming of the remaining funds for high priority work items. The S&PF Fire Program granted an additional **\$100,000 of cooperative fire funds to the Borough** to assist



The Spruce Bark Beetle Task Force has made wildfire risk and public safety its first priority for managing the bark beetle.

with high priority fire prevention actions near communities.

The widely supported actions identified by this Task Force have continued to be funded.

In 2000, \$2,000,000 from the Forest Service Fire Program budget was provided to further implement projects.

In 2001, nearly \$7,500,000 is included in the National Fire Plan budget for projects identified by the Task Force.

Alaska State Division of Forestry personnel are heavily involved in wildfire behavior and assessment, firewise, and seed collection projects.

Projects Completed to Date

- **174 pounds of seed** were collected, and are stored in Palmer for regeneration efforts.
- **Wildfire escape routes** were identified for all Kenai Peninsula communities and 3 sites of refuge were identified as facing the greatest risk of an urban interface wildfire.
- Development of a GIS based Kenai Peninsula **Wildfire Hazard/Risk Assessment**.
- Development of a GIS based **vegetation map** of the Kenai Peninsula Borough.
- Development of **forest health plans** for Seward, Seldovia,

Kenai, and Homer. **Firewise Demonstration communities** being developed in Kenai, Soldotna, and Moose Pass.

- Test and upgrade the Kenai Peninsula Borough's **emergency notification network**.
- **Removal of hazard trees** from Alaska state campgrounds.
- The Kenai Peninsula Borough is partnering with several federal and state agencies to develop **Alaskan fuel models** and wildfire behavior models.
- Partner with the Alaska Division of Forestry in the development of the **Alaska Community Firewise Program**.

Future Actions

- In 2001, hazard trees will be removed from schools, parks and high public use areas.
- Removal of fuel loading (slash/debris) from around peninsula communities; contracts are currently being let to service all Peninsula communities.
- A reforestation effort is underway to replant beetle impacted forests on Native lands.
- The Kenai Peninsula Borough is partnering with Peninsula utility companies to remove

hazard trees threatening utility distribution lines.

- Contracts are being developed to remove hazard trees from along 150 miles of identified high-hazard Peninsula roads.

- The Kenai Peninsula Borough is preparing to develop Firewise demonstration projects in every Peninsula community in conjunction with local, state, and federal fire officials.

- Expansion of the vegetative mapping efforts into the Mat-Su Borough and Copper Valley areas.

Other Applications for the Process

The Western Governors have encouraged a new doctrine for developing solutions to controversial environmental problems. This doctrine has been named *Enlibra*, which means balance and stewardship. This Task Force effort is a good example of putting this doctrine into action and provides a framework for others to consider when facing resource management issues in which consensus agreement is possible.

Partners in this Project

- Forest Service, Alaska Region
- Kenai Peninsula Borough
- State of Alaska, Department of Natural Resources, Division of Forestry

To Find Out More

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