

CRYSTAL LAKE HIGH VALUE TREE PROTECTION PROJECT

USDA FOREST SERVICE SAN GABRIEL MOUNTAINS NATIONAL MONUMENT, ANGELES NATIONAL FOREST LOS ANGELES COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

Location of Proposed Action: Township T3N, Range R9W, Sections 20, 21, 28 and 29

The Crystal Lake Recreation area is a highly valued and very popular campground within the San Gabriel Mountains National Monument. It is situated in a mature mixed conifer forest with hundreds of large, old trees. The Recreation Area has a history of bark beetle outbreaks in its mature pine trees. In 2004 approximately 300 high-value pine trees in the campground were sprayed with the insecticide carbaryl. A post-treatment evaluation performed in February 2007 determined the preventive spraying was successful as no further bark beetle activity was detected in the campground. In 2009 a large number of trees were once again sprayed with carbaryl as increasing bark beetle activity was occurring.

A 2023 report from the southern California Forest Health Protection entomologist (FHP Report SC-23-03) observed an active western pine beetle infestation in approximately 40 large diameter ponderosa pines in the immediate area surrounding the cafe area of the Crystal Lake Campground. Of the 40, a large majority were standing dead, and the green infested trees are declining.

The *purpose* of this project is to prevent further tree mortality caused by bark beetles. There is a *need* to protect high-value pine trees within this developed recreation site to protect public safety, improve forest health, and foster recreational enjoyment of the campground.

There are multiple reasons to protect the large pines within the campground that are currently not infested, but are close enough to become targets for the ongoing bark beetle outbreak. Much of the recreational and aesthetic value of the Crystal Lake campground lies in its forested character, which is a rare landscape type within Los Angeles County. If lost, those trees cannot be easily, quickly, or cheaply replaced. The cost of removing a large number of dead and dying trees to protect public safety within the campground would be prohibitive. If the bark beetle outbreak is allowed to progress, the result would be an unsafe environment for visitors and potentially the need to close the highly popular Crystal Lake Campground for a long period of time.

The Angeles National Forest proposes to spray the boles of selected high value trees with the insecticide bifenthrin. Treatment will involve the use of high pressure spray equipment operated from the ground or from a crane (“cherry picker”) by a licensed applicator. Approximately 120 trees will be treated within the 312 acre project area. Treatments will occur in the spring (after little to no snow remains on the ground under the trees) of 2024 and 2025 as bifenthrin requires two years of application to be effective. If the Forest determines that treatment is needed in subsequent years, a new spraying project will be proposed.

This project is consistent with the objectives and management direction of the Angeles National Forest Land Management Plan (Part 1, Goal: 1.2 - Restore forest health where alterations of natural fire regimes have put human and natural resource values at risk), as required by the National Forest Management Act (FSM 1926.41, and FSH 1909.12) It also meets the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act; Endangered Species Act; National Historic Preservation Act; Clean Water Act; Clean Air Act; and all other applicable Acts.

This action will not require a Civil Rights Impact Statement because it will not have a significant impact on the social environment.

Treatment will be conducted under the following design features and mitigation measures:

Selected trees for treatment will meet the following criteria:

- Relatively healthy
- Accessible by equipment
- Not have evidence of existing bark beetle infestation
- Not be within 100 feet of standing water, intermittent, ephemeral or a live channel/stream
- More than 6 inches diameter (dbh)
- Be among the tallest and healthiest trees in the stand
- High-value tree adding an important element to the recreational setting

Project implementation will involve:

- Mapping and inventory of each individual tree selected for treatment.
- The gate at the bottom of the Crystal Lake Road will be closed to prevent all vehicular access to the area. Signs will be clearly posted at the gate as well as throughout the Recreation Area explaining that insecticides have recently been applied, what the chemical is, who to contact with questions, and when the area will be opened again. These signs will be bilingual in English and Spanish.
- The insecticide will be applied by a state-licensed pesticide applicator.
- Insecticide treatment will comply with state and federal pesticide laws and will be applied strictly in accordance with the label directions. Bifenthrin has a human health and ecological risk assessment that is posted on the Forest Service website (<https://www.fs.usda.gov/foresthealth/protecting-forest/integrated-pest-management/pesticide-management/pesticide-risk-assessments.shtml>).
- The area will be closed to public use during spraying operations and for at least 1 full day after project completion for safety reasons and to provide best access for those conducting the spraying. The public will be notified of the area closure via all of the Angeles National Forest's various media accounts. If conditions allow, spraying will occur midweek when the normal recreational use of the area is much lower than on weekends.
- Spraying will only occur if certain environmental conditions are within acceptable parameters as follow:
 - Wind speeds shall not exceed 10 miles per hour on a sustained basis, as measured by standard FS "belt weather kit" procedures, and will be measured by Forest Service personnel. Wind direction will be monitored to assure that drift is minimized, especially in the direction of any water.

- Rainfall must not be anticipated (forecast) for a minimum of six hours after operations are complete for the day. Six hours is sufficient time to allow the pesticide to dry in place.
- Trees will be treated before the beetle flight period begins in spring. The work should be completed by late spring or early summer.
- Picnic tables, fire grates, well pumps, toilets and other improvements will be covered to avoid contamination spray drift during the spraying operations.
- Heritage resource sites will be identified to the project manager who will implement measures to protect these sites from the effects of the spraying such as but not limited to: no staging of project materials or activities on the site, minimize overspray, no access via the site, and treat trees on the site with spraying only as a last resort.
- Adhere to all mitigation measures recommended by Forest Service specialist in Specialist Reports.

The proposed action falls under the following categories of actions that may be excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement (EIS) or environmental assessment (EA) and normally does not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the human environment: **FSH 1909.15, Chapter 30, category 36 CFR 220.6(d)(5). *Repair and maintenance of recreation sites and facilities – Applying registered insecticides by compressed air sprayer to control insects at a recreation site complex.***

The environmental analysis conducted for the proposed action determined that there were no extraordinary circumstances or conditions that would result in significant adverse effects. Hence, this action is not subject to appeal under the requirements of 36 CFR 215.