



Southern Pine Beetle Briefing Paper

National Forests in Alabama

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Topic: Southern Pine Beetle Infestation in Alabama's National Forests

Issue: The USDA Forest Service has organized an Incident Command Team to manage an outbreak of southern pine beetles (SPB) in Alabama's National Forests. Recent aerial and ground surveys have detected unusual SPB activity in the Bankhead National Forest and Talladega National Forest. The coordination of resources between the National Forests in Alabama, Alabama Forestry Commission, Forest Service forest health specialists and additional partners will involve SPB prevention, detection and suppression. Southern pine beetles are a serious threat to the health of a forest and without a "plan of attack", SPB can result in the loss of a large number of trees.



Southern pine beetle outbreaks can cause tremendous destruction and loss of timber. Photo by John Nowak, USFS.

Key Points:

- In 2014, the Bankhead and Talladega National Forests were designated under the 2014 Farm Bill as "insect and disease treatment areas" by the Secretary of Agriculture at the request of Alabama's former Governor Robert Bentley. The National Forests in Alabama and Alabama Forestry Commission entered into the first Good Neighbor Authority agreement in 2016 to join forces against the impacts of southern pine beetles.
- In March 2017, land managers started to see unusual levels of tree deaths in the state and the Alabama Forestry Commission (AFC) and Forest Service forest health specialists responded confirming pine beetles in several places. Detection of SPB activity using AFC aerial survey and ground checking now have reported approximately 600 southern pine beetle "spots" (groups of dead and dying pine trees) throughout the Bankhead and Talladega National Forests.
- The Forest Service major objective is detection, suppression and risk reduction of SPB. Prevention programs consist of restoration (tree planting), thinning and prescribed fire (control burns). Thinning is a very effective management tool for preventing southern pine beetle impacts. Tree conditions are improved through thinning as well as creating barriers for southern pine beetle growth and spread.
- Annually, the National Forests in Alabama conduct thinning and restoration treatments on approximately 6,000 – 8,000 acres. Of the approximately 670,000-acre total forest areas, over 100,000 acres are prescribed burned each year. Management activities have multiple benefits beyond protecting forests from SPB, such as maintaining a resilient forest, improving wildlife habitat and reducing fire risk.
- Despite ongoing forest health and restoration projects, Alabama's Forests, both public and private, became subjected to a SPB outbreak. Sometimes populations of the native SPB can be triggered by climatic events, such as last year's drought in Alabama. Land managers were also challenged by a severe wildfire season that followed on the heels of Alabama's drought.
- National Forest managers and forest health specialists are working together with AFC to assess southern pine beetle behavior, location and spot access. Soon the partners will begin collaborating with interested groups to formulate a strategy to reduce suitable habitats and lessen impacts of southern pine beetles.
- Members of the public can help stop the spread of forests pest by leaving firewood at home and not transporting firewood into campgrounds or national forests. Learn more about SPB at <https://www.srs.fs.usda.gov/compass/category/insects-and-diseases/>



National Forests in Alabama
Southern Pine Beetle Fast Facts
Week of September 18, 2017

The southern pine beetle (*Dendroctonus frontalis*) is the most destructive native forest insect pest. SPB measures only about 1/8 of an inch. They create S-shaped galleries under the bark at almost any height on the tree. After maturing in the tree bark, the SPB will bore their way out and fly off to attack another pine tree. Forest managers use various methods to suppress and control the SPB. The best insurance is to cut a buffer strip of un-infested pines around the active head in the beetle infested area. The practice will interrupt the SPB flow of host trees and stop their advance.

Bankhead National Forest

National Forest Location: Winston, Lawrence and Franklin Counties

Congressional Districts: Congressman Robert Aderholt (R- District 4) – Bankhead NF

Approximate Number of Ground Checked SPB Spots (Areas): 24 spots for approximately 55 acres

SPB Spot (Area) Latest Flight Detection: 259 spots

SPB Treated Acres: Timber harvesting within timber sales.

Estimated Percentage of Acres Impacted: Less than 1/2 percent of district acres

Estimated Wilderness Acres Impacted: Approximately 20 acres

Technology Used: Aerial Detection, GPS, GIS, Portable Data Recorders

Response Phase: Assessment and Treatment Phase



Adult southern pine beetle. Photo by Erich Vallery, courtesy of Bugwood.org

Talladega National Forest – Oakmulgee District

National Forest Location: Chilton, Dallas, Hale, Perry, Tuscaloosa Counties.

Congressional Districts: Congressman Gary Palmer (R-District 6) and Congresswoman Terri Sewell (D-District 7)

Approximate Number of Ground Checked SPB Spots (Areas): 60 spots for approximately 40 acres

SPB Spot (Area) Latest Flight Detection: 309 Spots

SPB Treated Acres: No timber harvesting action to date

Estimated Percentage of Acres Impacted: Less than 1/4 percent of the district acres

Technology Used: Aerial Detection, GPS, GIS, Portable Data Recorders

Response Phase: Assessment and Treatment Phase

Talladega National Forest – Talladega District

National Forest Location: Cleburne, Clay and Talladega Counties

Congressional Districts: Congressman Mike Rogers (R-District 3)

Approximate Number of Ground Checked SPB Spots (Areas): 8 spots for approximately 18 acres

SPB Spot (Area) Latest Flight Detection: 24 spots

SPB Treated Acres: No timber harvesting action to date

Estimated Percentage of Acres Impacted: Less than 1/4 percent of the district acres

Estimated Wilderness Acres Impacted: Less than 1/4 percent of wilderness

Technology Used: Aerial Detection, GPS, GIS, Portable Data Recorders

Response Phase: Assessment Phase

Talladega National Forest – Shoal Creek District

National Forest Location: Calhoun, Cleburne, Clay, and Cherokee Counties

Congressional Districts: Congressman Mike Rogers (R-District 3)

Approximate Number of Ground Checked SPB Spots (Areas): 2 spots for approximately 3 acres

SPB Spot (Area) Latest Flight Detection: 15 spots

SPB Treated Acres: No timber harvesting action to date

Estimated Percentage of Acres Impacted: Less than 1/4 percent of the district

Estimated Wilderness Acres Impacted: Less than 1/4 percent of wilderness

Technology Used: Aerial Detection, GPS, GIS, Portable Data Recorders

Response Phase: Assessment Phase