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USDA Forest Service . . . National Forests in North Carolina . . . . Public Affairs Office

Southern Pine Beetle Timber Damage Has Tripled In Past Year, Says NCDFR

The North Carolina Division of Forest Resources has been seeing an increasing trend of the Southern Pine Beetle in the mountain region of North Carolina. The NCDFR is responsible for providing assistance to the forest landowners of the state in the control of destructive forest insects and diseases.

One of the most destructive insect enemies is the Southern Pine Beetle. In 1999, 29 counties had detected the Southern Pine Beetle spotting, and now in 2000, 32 counties have reported problems.

Yancey County experienced Pine Beetle problems earlier this year, with infestations in areas of the Pisgah National Forest. Officials are monitoring the situation.

Paul Merten, Pest Control Forester with the NCDFR said, "Southern Pine Beetle activity is still on the rise, every indication is that populations are increasing. Sixteen of the thirty-two counties with Southern Pine Beetle spotting are severe enough to be at epidemic proportions."

The value of timber killed by this epidemic has tripled in the past year because of the increase of the Southern Pine Beetle population in western North Carolina. Amazingly enough, no outbreaks have been reported or detected in the eastern part of the state.

The outbreaks are primarily centered in the higher elevations of the mountains and the worst counties with outbreaks are found from Caldwell county west. Merten said that the severe drought that the North Carolina mountains have experienced over the past three years has increased infestation rates in elevations of 2000 feet or more.

There have even been indications of the beetle being founding trees it doesn't typically attack, such as the White Pine or the Norway Spruce.

continued on page 2

Merten said that this is due to a combination of both drought conditions and the age and vigorousness of the timber in which the beetles are attacking.

Typically a Southern Pine Beetle outbreak runs on a 3-year cycle. There have been indications of an increase over the past two years, so forestry officials are hopeful that the outbreak will begin to decline soon, provided the mountains do not receive further drought conditions this upcoming spring and summer.

Merten says, "there are ways of controlling the epidemic if it happens, but the methods and applicability vary in geographic regions. If citizens believe that they have a Southern Pine Beetle outbreak, they need to contact their local county ranger for further evaluation."

Yancey residents should contact Ranger Baccuss Hensley at 682-6146 if they notice Pine Beetle activity.

Publication: ASHEVILLE CITIZEN-TIMES **Date:** MONDAY, NOV. 27, 2000

Beetles threaten Biltmore trees

Residents urged to treat or remove infested pines

By Barbara Blake
STAFF WRITER

BILTMORE FOREST – Biltmore Forest is a town, but it's also a forest. A forest filled with lovely old pine trees that grace the meandering roads and stately lawns of the upscale neighborhood abutting the Biltmore Estate.

But there is growing fear that the natural beauty of this town of 1,500 is in serious peril as it faces the second year of an infestation by the Southern pine beetle – a remorseless insect that can swiftly destroy hundreds of trees if they are not treated or removed.

"We don't have a year or two years," said Jim Hefley, a retiree who has headed a committee charged with dealing with Biltmore Forest's growing problem. "We have 120 days to accomplish our work – to remove the infested trees," he said, referring to the lull during the winter months before the beetles begin reproducing in the spring.

At a meeting earlier this month, Hefley spent more than an hour explaining to residents the gravity of the situation, saying nearly 700 pine trees in the town have had to be removed as a result of the beetle infestation.

But the most important message he sent is that all residents of the town must inspect their properties to see if the beetles have made homes in their trees. And if they have, they must be treated or taken down. Otherwise, the infestation will spread throughout the town and all of the trees will be in jeopardy.

"All of us secretly wish there was some magic potion we could spray on these trees," Hefley said. "But it's not going to happen; removal is the only way to get them out, and we're all going to have to come to grips with that fact."

The beetles attack pine trees by boring small holes in the bark and depositing eggs within the sap-carrying layer underneath. The eggs hatch and grow into worms that feed on the sap-carrying layer. Infested trees pose a significant hazard to neighboring pine-tree stands, and those infested trees should be aggressively treated with insecticide or, preferably, removed, Hefley said.

A copy of a "Southern Pine Beetle Alert" was passed out at the Nov. 14

Please see BEETLES on B3

"All of us secretly wish there was some magic potion we could spray on these trees. But it's not going to happen; removal is the only way to get (the beetles) out, and we're all going to have to come to grips with that fact."

JIM HEFLEY, head of committee dealing with Southern pine beetles

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USDA Forest Service . . . National Forests in North Carolina . . . . Public Affairs Office

BEETLES: Biltmore Forest combats Southern pine beetle infestation

Continued from B1

meeting, explaining the life cycle of the insect and steps that should be taken by all residents.

"You can curtail the amount of future damage by aggressively addressing the problem this winter while the Southern pine beetle is less active," the alert says. "If you do not take steps this winter, (beetle) activity in the spring may increase to the point that fatal damage is done to the majority of pine trees on your property.

"You must IMMEDIATELY make a cursory examination of all pine trees on your property to determine if the Southern pine beetle is present," the alert says.

Hefley urged residents to check on neighbors' property if they are absent or on extended vacations "as a means of protecting your property."

"It is important that we obtain 100 percent compliance from all property owners within Biltmore Forest in the next 30 to 60 days in order to curtail a potential Southern pine beetle population explosion in the spring of 2001," he said.

While Hefley said tree removal is the best method to destroy the beetle infestation, there is a slim hope that nature can keep the crisis at bay.

Rusty Rhea, a U.S. Forest Service specialist, said an extremely bitter winter could kill the insects. But it would have to be extreme.

"We would need the teens or single digits (as high temperatures) for several days, and that will kill them," Rhea said. "But we've had such mild winters the last few years, and that's what's caused this problem. The whole region is endemic."

The residents at the meeting seemed committed to taking care of the problem as quickly as possible, even if it means taking down trees on their property to avoid what could amount to a clear-cutting of Biltmore Forest if the infestation is not stopped.

"Thank God we started when we did," said Commissioner Charles Grimes, applauding the committee for its work. "I think one of the best things I've done in my 13 years (on the town board) is appointing Jim Hefley to head this committee."

Commissioner David Grimes agreed, saying Hefley's group "has taken off like a rocket, and you clearly know exactly what we need to do."

"What we do in the next 120 days will dramatically affect how Biltmore Forest looks in 25 or 50 years," Hefley said, reiterating the urgent need for all residents to participate in the eradication effort.

"If your neighbor has a pine beetle infestation and doesn't deal with it, and you don't have the beetles ... you will," he said. "We must have 100 percent cooperation if we're going to pull this off."

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USDA Forest Service . . . National Forests in North Carolina . . . . Public Affairs Office

article-Courtesy of Highland R.D.

Pine infestation increasing

The North Carolina Division of Forest Resources (NCDFR) has been seeing an increase of the Southern Pine beetle in the mountain region of North Carolina.

This infestation affects all species of pine, said Lloyd Green, NCDFR county ranger for Jackson County.

NCDFR is responsible for providing assistance to the forest landowners of the state in the control of destructive forest insects and diseases. One of the most destructive insects in North Carolina is the Southern Pine beetle. Reports of the beetle have risen from 29 counties in 1999 to 32 in 2000.

"Southern Pine beetle activity is still on the rise; every indication is that populations are increasing," said Paul Merten, pest control forester with NCDFR. "Sixteen of the 32 counties with Southern Pine beetle spotting are severe enough to be at epidemic proportions."

Green said that the drought has been one factor contributing to the infestations.

"Dry weather's been a problem, because dry weather puts the trees under stress," said Green, which makes them more susceptible to attack.

The value of timber killed by this epidemic has tripled in the past year because of the infestations in Western North Carolina. But no outbreaks have been reported in eastern North Carolina.

Most outbreaks are centered in the higher elevations of the mountains and the counties with the worst problems are from Caldwell County west.

Because of the prolonged drought, Merten said, the Southern Pine beetle has begun attacking trees it doesn't normally attack such as the White Pine and Norway Spruce.

Typically, a Southern Pine beetle outbreak runs on a three-year cycle. There have been indications of an increase during the past two years, so forestry officials said they hope the outbreak will begin to slow soon. They said this would depend on whether or not the mountains break the drought cycle they have been experiencing.

"There are ways of controlling the epidemic if it is attacking an area," said Merten, "but the methods and applicability vary in geographic regions. If citizens believe that they may have a Southern Pine beetle outbreak, they need to contact their local county ranger for further evaluation."

Jackson County Ranger Lloyd Green may be reached at (828) 586-4007.