



Flathead National Forest

Media Release

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Flathead National Forest is Pro-active and Proposes to Salvage Trees Affected by Mountain Pine Beetles on Swan Lake District

The Swan Lake Ranger District of the Flathead National Forest is being pro-active in response to mountain pine beetle activity. The Summit Mountain Pine Beetle Salvage Project is being proposed to salvage trees affected by mountain pine beetles located on National Forest System lands approximately 10 miles south of Condon, Montana. The project includes activities on approximately 1,300 acres.

Swan Lake District Ranger Steve Brady said, "We identified a mountain pine beetle infestation last year and believe it to be a significant forest health concern." Aerial surveys did not detect the infestation in 2007, but field surveys conducted in 2008 identified pine beetle activity and extensive areas with a high percentage of lodge pole that were dead or dying. Brady anticipates additional tree mortality and believes that the outbreak is a serious situation. Brady said, "Our response to the current beetle outbreak is primarily to make use of the trees which are dead and dying, and mitigate future outbreaks. Based on many years of research and experience, it is not possible to stop a large scale pine beetle outbreak in an area this large. However, timely harvest can mitigate the effects."

Brady explained that there is a limited time frame in which the affected trees are economically valuable which makes a rapid response a priority for the Flathead National Forest. Through harvest of the dead and dying trees, Brady anticipates that the project will also reduce long-term fuel build up and would assist the local economy. This project would also affect future outbreaks by reducing bark beetle hazard through thinning stands of dense trees and creating a landscape with a variety of tree ages in advance of the beetle.

The Summit Mountain Pine Beetle Salvage Project was proposed earlier this year and an environmental assessment is being prepared by Forest Service Resource Specialists. Brady said the assessment should be available for public review and comment by the end of July.

The purpose of the project is to address the beetle outbreak by recovering merchantable timber from areas affected by the mountain pine beetle and provide wood products for the local economy. Proposed activities include harvesting beetle-affected trees using tractor logging systems during the winter season and treating slash piles with chipping and burning. Access to the affected areas would include use of existing roads and some temporary road construction.

Brady encourages the public to provide public comment once the environmental assessment is completed in late July. For more information about the proposed Summit Mountain Pine Beetle Salvage Project, contact Project Leader Joleen Dunham at 837-7510.

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Mountain Pine Beetle-

The mountain pine beetle is a native insect to the Western United States and is always present in the forest in low numbers. The beetle is very small, no bigger than a grain of rice. Extended drought conditions, warm winters and aging forests contribute to increased beetle activity.

The most common homes the beetles seek are large ponderosa or lodgepole pine trees. The mountain pine beetle completes one cycle of development from egg to adult per year. The beetles bore into trees, lay eggs and introduce a blue stain fungus which blocks the flow of water and ultimately kills the tree. Adult beetles emerge from the infested trees the next summer traveling up to several miles to attack new trees.

In forests with green trees, beetle activity can be identified by popcorn size “pitch tubes” dotting the bark of the tree indicating the tree’s effort to ward off the beetle. Fine sawdust, or frass, may also be seen at the base of the tree trunk. Tree needles remain green for 8-10 months after the tree has been killed by beetles, not turning red or reddish brown until a year or more after the attack.

Mountain pine beetle photo.

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