

# MOUNTAIN PINE BEETLE EPIDEMIC

## Rocky Mountain Region – Mountain Pine Beetle Emphasis

The mountain pine beetle, as well as other insects and disease, are at epidemic levels throughout the western United States. The Rocky Mountain Region forests affected, include those in Colorado, Wyoming and South Dakota. In northern Colorado and southeastern Wyoming, mountain pine beetles have impacted more than 4 million acres since the first signs of outbreak in 1996. Concern about the epidemic is particularly high in this area due to watershed values and recreation use. Mitigation is critical because hazardous fuels and falling trees impact watershed resources, human health and safety, and basic services such as travel, electricity, and water.

The Rocky Mountain Region declared the effects of the epidemic an emergency and ordered a National Incident Management Organization (NIMO) in the fall of 2009. NIMO's approach to the incident was to create a "theater of operation" comprised of the Arapaho-Roosevelt, Medicine Bow-Routt, and White River National Forests. Mitigation is managed, prioritized, and carried out by an Incident Management Organization (IMO). Formation of a theater of operations for this incident has facilitated focused mitigation and increased information sharing.

## Issues

1. The imminent danger of falling trees pose significant health and safety threats. Dead trees are falling at an ever increasing rate; stands are beginning to fail; winds and soil moisture are influencing tree stability. Employees, contractors and permittees received safety guidelines.
2. Fire hazard is high for one to two years after trees are attacked, while red needles are still on the trees. Once the dead trees lose their needles, the fire hazard declines. Fire hazard rises again after the trees fall. Clearing and creating fuel breaks influence how quickly a fire can move, allowing time for people to move out of harm's way and providing a safer area for firefighters to work to protect homes, watersheds, and public/private infrastructure.
3. Many miles of roads and trails, and forest recreation areas are affected. Hazardous trees threaten the safety of the public and USFS employees.
    - 3,700 miles of roads;
    - 460 developed recreation sites;
    - 1300 miles of trails; and
    - 16 ski areas.
4. Damaged power lines could cause wildfires and/or blackouts. Electricity generated in western Colorado must be transmitted across beetle-killed areas to serve Front Range demands. Wildfire and falling trees could damage power lines, disrupting service for thousands of people.
    - In Colorado, beetle-killed trees threaten more than 550 miles of transmission and distribution lines.
    - In Wyoming, beetle-killed trees threaten more than 69 miles of distribution lines.
5. Essential water supplies are at risk. Water quality for millions of people could be affected by wildland fire. The heart of the epidemic in Colorado and Wyoming contains the headwaters for rivers that supply water to 13 western states.

## Key Points:

### *Additional Funding in FY 2010*

In FY 2010, Secretary Vilsack directed $40 million to the Rocky Mountain Region to address bark beetle infestations. The majority of the funds--$35 million--was directed to the infestation in northern Colorado and southern Wyoming (Arapaho-Roosevelt, White River and Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests).

### *Rocky Mountain Region Emphasis*

Safety is the major focus of the incident. Significant steps taken include the following:

- Theater Communication Plan
- Theater Safety Guidelines
- Safety stand downs
- Contractors and permittees received safety guidelines
- Hazard Tree Awareness Training
- Near-miss and event reporting
- Full-time roving safety officers
- Safety signing
- Suppression guidelines

With the additional funding, focused efforts increased on the hardest hit areas of the epidemic, in four activity areas.

1. Hazardous tree removal from roads, trails, and campgrounds;
2. Hazardous fuels removal from the wildland urban interface and administrative sites;
3. Working with permittees, hazardous tree removal from infrastructure such as power lines, recreation residences, and ski area facilities; and
4. Public informed about the hazards through web site; distribution of brochures and publications; signing; and added patrols.

### *FY 2010 Accomplishments, Preparation for Next Year's Work, and Expenditures:*

| | *Removal of Hazard Trees along Roads (miles)* | *Removal of Hazard Trees along Trails (miles)* | *WUI Fuel Reduction (acres)* | *Number of Developed Recreation Sites with Mitigation Projects* | *Expenditures* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2010 Accomplishments in SE Wyoming | 56 | 15 | 1,701 | 54 | |
| 2010 Accomplishments in N Colorado | 210 | 147 | 12,188 | 303 | |
| **Total 2010 Accomplishments** | **266** | **162** | **13,889** | **357** | |
| Prepped for Out-year SE Wyoming | 193 | 35 | 5,750 | | |
| Prepped for Out-year N. Colorado | 456 | 161 | 33,224 | | |
| **Total Prepped for Out-year Implementation** | **649** | **196** | **38,974** | | |
| Total Spent in SE Wyoming 2010 | $3,187,000 | $315,000 | $3,024,000 | $936,000 | $7,462,000 |
| Total Spent in N. Colorado 2010 | $7,775,000 | $2,194,000 | $15,340,000 | $2,730,000 | $28,039,000 |
| **Total Spent in 2010** | **$10,962,000** | **$2,509,000** | **$18,364,000** | **$3,666,000** | **$35,501,000** |

### *FY 2011*

In FY 2011, $32.2 million has been directed to continue priority bark beetle mitigation work. Of that amount, the majority will be directed to the infestation in northern Colorado and southern Wyoming. Work will continue in the four activity areas indentified above.