

NEWS RELEASE

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DROUGHT AND INSECTS AFFECTING SACRAMENTO MOUNTAIN TREES

Alamogordo, NM (December 20, 2011) - Findings from an annual survey completed by the USDA Forest Service's Forest Health Protection Program and the New Mexico State Forestry Division show increased conifer mortality in and around the Sacramento Mountains due to the current drought and infestations of a variety of bark beetle species.

According to the two agencies, aerial and ground surveys in the Sacramento Mountains area show several species of bark beetle are currently causing the mortality of ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir, and white fir trees at levels higher than observed in 2010. If current drought conditions persist, tree stress and mortality will likely continue to increase in 2012.

Due to the recent drought, trees in the Lincoln National Forest and surrounding areas in south central New Mexico have become increasingly stressed. Bark beetles frequently attack and kill drought-stressed trees, in particular conifers. When this occurs, beetle populations may increase to levels where they can aggressively attack and kill the surrounding healthy trees, leading to pockets of mortality in an area. "Prolonged severe drought and extreme cold last winter have left trees on private and public land very stressed," said New Mexico State Forester Tony Delfin. "This stress leaves trees susceptible to disease infections and insect infestation."

While proper thinning treatments have been shown to help reduce stress on trees and increase their ability to resist bark beetles and disease, land managers are currently exploring ways to minimize the impact of this increase in bark beetle infestation and will continue to coordinate with private, local, state, federal and tribal entities to respond to the increase in tree mortality. "Over the past ten years, the Lincoln National forest has treated 10,000 to 14,000 acres annually with 16,000 acres treated in 2011," explained Robert Trujillo, Lincoln National Forest Supervisor.

A workshop is planned for January 24, 2012 at the Ruidoso Convention Center from 1 pm to 3 pm. The workshop will present the latest information along with potential management and ecological effects of current bark beetle populations.

Current information on aerial surveys and insects and diseases in the Southwest, are available at the USFS Forest Health webpage, www.fs.usda.gov/goto/r3/foresthealth. For more information please contact Andrew Sánchez Meador at 575-434-7200 or New Mexico State Forestry at 505-476-3351 or 575-354-2231. Information is also available on the Lincoln National Forest and New Mexico State Forestry Division websites at www.fs.usda.gov/lincoln or www.nmforestry.com.

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