

Working Together to Trap Exotic Species

By Sue Jennings, Writer/Editor, Tongass National Forest

Charles Knight and Curtis Knight of the State of Alaska Division of Agriculture are searching for invasive (exotic) insect species throughout Alaska. In a state the size of Alaska, the possibility of covering all the ports and forests may seem daunting. Fortunately, they are not working alone but in partnership with the Forest Service and other agencies throughout Alaska.

In June each year, Forest Service employees hang traps from Ketchikan to Seward and many places in between. The traps are different sizes and shapes to target different insect species. Each trap is baited with a species specific pheromone and hung in the preferred habitat for that insect. The traps target areas where people and cargo from out of state come ashore. Adult gypsy moths and moth egg clusters have been found on RVs near ferry terminals and in campgrounds, on potted garden plants, and by U.S. Customs on crates being offloaded in Alaskan harbors. The species targeted by the traps set on the Chugach and Tongass national forests are European and Asian gypsy moths, rosy gypsy moths, Siberian silk moths, small brown apple moths, and eastern ash borers.

It is important to find these species when the population numbers are low because it is possible to eradicate the insects when they have a low population. Eradication can be done by blanketing the infected area with traps, so the species does not reproduce for several years; insecticide; or removing the infected trees. Once the invasive insect population is large, it is almost impossible to eradicate. For example, when gypsy moth populations are large, they can totally defoliate the forest canopy over hundreds of miles. This defoliation usually kills all of the trees in the infected area. Unlike the eastern ash borer or the small brown apple moth that specialize in one tree species, the gypsy moth can infect hundreds of different species and wipe out all of the trees in a forest.

While working with local resource specialists, the Knights are also looking for European black slugs. This slug is larger than the resident slugs. Some were found in Cordova feasting on dandelions and dog droppings. Although this sounds like a good thing for most yards in Alaska, exotic species



Britta Schroeder, Jason Johnson, and Curtis Knight construct gypsy moth traps at the Wrangell Ranger District. Curtis is wearing gloves so that he does not mix the pheromone baits used in the traps. Pheromones from some moth species repel moths from other species. Photo by Sue Jennings.



Curtis Knight puts together a wing trap for the rosy gypsy moth while Charles Knight looks on. Photo by Sue Jennings.

can often out-compete native species and throw off the natural balance. The State and Forest Service are trying to eradicate this slug species before it gets out of control.

If you see any of these invasive species or suspect that you've seen them, please contact your local Forest Service office.