

Forest Products Modernization: Innovation Underway

Leveraging Partnerships To Treat Southern Pine Beetle Damage in Region 8

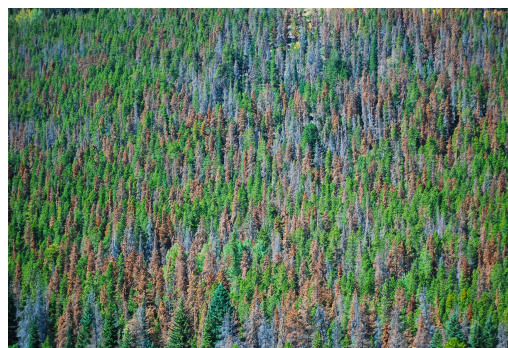
In 2017 and 2018, a major Southern Pine Beetle outbreak occurred across much of the national forests in Mississippi and Alabama. The USDA Forest Service Southeastern Region is responding with forest restoration, beetle outbreak risk reduction and suppression, and salvage harvest. The National Forests in Alabama and the Alabama Forestry Commission signed two Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) agreements and are using authorities in the Healthy Forests Restoration Act to conduct seven risk reduction treatments across 10,000 acres. Additionally, the National Forests in Mississippi implemented several measures to facilitate removal of damaged timber:

- Requesting procedural relief for timber contracting as part of a salvage sale plan
- Entering into a 10-year stewardship contract with several partners, including the National Wild Turkey Federation, to implement forest health restoration and outbreak suppression.
- Signing a GNA agreement with the Mississippi Forestry Commission to survey timber removal sites and implement restoration and mitigation work.
- Designation of 500,000 acres as insect and disease treatment areas under the 2014 Farm Bill, allowing certain projects under 12,000 acres to be categorically excluded from further environmental analysis and documentation.

Through the procedural relief for timber contracting, the National Forests in Mississippi were able to award 38 timber sales and sell 355,000 cubic feet of timber for salvage of infested trees and thinning of healthy trees to promote stand-level resilience in FY 2018.

Ingredients for Success

Collaboration among the USDA Forest Service, State forest management agencies in Mississippi and Alabama, and private stakeholders such as the National Wild Turkey Federation allows for increased efficiency in timber removal. Because the sales in Mississippi were salvage sales, and because the forest had three dedicated timber contracting officers and multiple FS representatives, the forest was able to award the sales quickly after a 7-day advertisement period.



USDA Forest Service satellite image of southern pine beetle damage.

Beetle detection has also been a critical component of outbreak response. For more efficient detection, Region 8 is using high resolution, multi-spectral imagery from the U.S. Geological Survey's Hazard Data Distribution System to complement field verification and airplane detection. The Forest Service processes the data through its Geospatial Technology Applications Center (GTAC) satellite imagery.

Lessons Learned

Procedural relief for more efficient timber removal in the National Forests in Mississippi allows for use of comparison cruising, increased risk adjustments in appraisals, weight scaling, and temporary rights-of-way. For contractual flexibility, the forests have the ability to package and extend sales under individual contracts. This has facilitated much greater rates of risk reduction, salvage, and outbreak suppression than has occurred in prior years.

Next Steps

Under the GNA agreement, the Mississippi Forestry Commission is developing a plan to perform erosion control on timber sales on the National Forests in Mississippi.

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