
Gallatin National Forest News Release



For Immediate Release
Date: July 13, 2006

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Gallatin Forest Experiencing Western Spruce Budworm Outbreak

Bozeman, MT... Portions of the Gallatin National Forest are experiencing a western spruce budworm outbreak. This native insect is following a natural cycle. The outbreak may be a result of lower than normal precipitation over the past few years or changes in forest conditions.

While in the larval stage of their lifecycle, the budworms prefer to feed on Douglas-fir, true firs, and occasionally spruce in the spring. The larvae look like developing caterpillars and cause the most damage to vegetation by eating needles and cones resulting in the red tipped or reddish colored trees. The caterpillars are also what some visitors to the Forest are currently seeing hanging from tree branches on silk threads. Caterpillars are tan to brown with two cream-colored dots on each body segment. Adult insects are orange-brown triangular moths, a little less than one inch across.

Although the spruce budworm does defoliate trees it doesn't necessarily kill them. Smaller trees found in a forest's understory may experience more mortality than larger trees because larvae fall from large trees and collect and feed on the smaller ones below. Moderate to even severely affected trees can recover from repeated attacks. However, trees or tree-tops can be killed when budworm populations remain high for long periods.

Gregg DeNitto of the Forest Service's Forest Health Protection program says "The outbreak we're currently experiencing began in 2001 and 2002 and may last for up to 10 years. Forest's could expect as much or more of an outbreak to occur next year, resulting in potential understory mortality in smaller trees and some mortality in the tops of larger trees and possibly entire trees."

(MORE)



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<http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/gallatin>

Complete control of western spruce budworm is not possible, desirable, or necessary over large areas. This native insect has many natural enemies that help control populations including birds, other insects, and ants. During spring-time emergence, cold or inclement weather conditions can also help reduce infestation numbers. Individual trees or small areas may be treated next spring by landowners to provide some level of protection.

“The reddish coloring on the hillsides will stay for awhile until the dead needles fall off,” continued DeNitto. “Actively treating the budworm now would not be effective since the budworm has done most of the damage this year. The best treatment for this year’s outbreak is natural predators.”

Private landowners wishing to treat budworm infestations on their property can contact their local Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) office for additional information. More details on western spruce budworm can be found on the internet at

http://www.fs.fed.us/r1-r4/spf/fhp/mgt_guide/western_spruce_budworm/index.html.

Montana State University Extension Service will be conducting a public meeting on Monday, July 17 at 1:00 pm with presentations on spruce budworm and other forest health issues. The meeting will be held at the Bridger Canyon Fire Station on Highway 86 south of Bridger Bowl. Speakers include Peter Kolb, MSU Extension Forester, Will Lanier, MSU Extension Entomologist, Ken Gibson, Forest Service Entomologist, and Kurt Tessmer DNRC Service Forester. A field trip may take place following the presentations.

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