



NEWS RELEASE



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U.S. FOREST SERVICE AND COLORADO STATE FOREST SERVICE ANNOUNCE RESULTS OF 2012 AERIAL FOREST HEALTH SURVEY

DENVER, Feb. 6, 2013 — The U.S. Forest Service and Colorado State Forest Service today released the results of the annual aerial forest health [survey](#) in Colorado, which indicates that the spread of the mountain pine beetle epidemic has slowed dramatically, while the spruce beetle outbreak is expanding.

The mountain pine beetle epidemic expanded by 31,000 acres, down from last year's reported increase of 140,000 acres. This brings the total infestation to nearly 3.4 million acres in Colorado since the first signs of the outbreak in 1996. Most mature lodgepole pine trees have now been depleted within the initial mountain pine beetle epidemic area. However, the infestation remains active from Estes Park to Leadville.

In contrast, the spruce beetle outbreak is expanding, with 183,000 new acres detected in 2012, bringing the total acreage affected since 1996 to nearly 1 million acres (924,000). The areas experiencing the most significant activity are on the San Juan and Rio Grande National Forests in southern Colorado. Spruce beetles typically attack spruce trees downed by high winds. Once the populations of spruce beetles build up in the fallen trees, the stressed trees surrounding them offer little resistance to attack. Similar to mountain pine beetle, the increase in spruce beetle activity is due to factors that increase tree stress, including densely stocked stands, ongoing drought conditions and warmer winters.

"Now more than ever it is important that we work across the entire landscape to ensure forests are more resilient for generations to come," said Dan Jirón, Regional Forester for the U.S. Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Region. "A vibrant forest products industry, aggressive community actions, strong collaborative efforts and targeted high-priority projects will allow us to make progress to promote forests more suitable for an uncertain future climate."

"The spruce beetle epidemic in our high-elevation forests demonstrates the breadth and complexity of issues affecting Colorado's forests," said Joe Duda, Interim State Forester and Director of the Colorado State Forest Service. "Active forest management and a viable forest products industry will allow landowners and land management agencies to expand forest treatments on lands available for management, while reducing wildfire risk and protecting important natural resources and infrastructure."

In late 2012, two 10-year stewardship contracts were awarded by the U.S. Forest Service to improve forest resiliency on 20,000 acres affected by the mountain pine beetle on the Medicine Bow-Routt and White River National Forests. These contracts are in addition to the Front Range and Pagosa Springs Long-Term Stewardship Contracts awarded previously. The contracts reduce forest health treatment costs and foster new uses of beetle-killed forest products to benefit forest resiliency and jobs.

The forest products industry is better positioned as mills come on line to take advantage of trees being removed from forested lands across Colorado. The U.S. Forest Service, Colorado State Forest Service and partners are working to provide a reliable and predictable supply of biomass for new markets.

“Over the past several years, the Forest Service has worked with local, state and private partners to increase our collective ability to improve forest health and reduce wildland fire and public safety risks,” said Jirón. “From encouraging biomass projects, to aggressively treating beetle-killed trees near communities, and partnering to protect water resources, the Forest Service is working to efficiently fund projects to treat as many priority forested acres as possible.”

Through the passage of legislation in recent years, the Colorado General Assembly has supported forest management actions that demonstrate community-based approaches to forest restoration and watershed health. The Colorado Forest Restoration Pilot Grant Program is a cost-share program that provides funding for up to 60 percent of the total cost for projects. To date, more than \$4.7 million in state funds and another \$1 million in leveraged federal funds have been awarded to 86 projects across the State. Those funds additionally leveraged more than \$8 million in matching funds to restore more than 12,000 acres of forest. In addition, the 17 projects currently in progress will result in treatments on another 1,200 acres.

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