



Colorado State Forest Service
5060 Campus Delivery
Colorado State University
Fort Collins, CO 80523-5060
970.491.6303; FAX 970.491.7736
<http://csfs.colostate.edu/>

NEWS

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Contact for Reporters: Ryan Lockwood

970.491.8970

ryan.lockwood@colostate.edu

Beetle-Kill Trees Pose Increasing Risk to Recreationists, Landowners

GRANBY, Colo. – Those living in or visiting the mountains of northern Colorado this summer should be aware that dead lodgepole pines in beetle-kill areas are now falling en masse, based on observations from foresters in Grand County.

Ron Cousineau, district forester for the Colorado State Forest Service Granby District, says that foresters have been anticipating a major falling event for years, following the mountain pine beetle outbreak. He says that in addition to standing dead snags, recreationists also need to be aware of the risk of “widowmakers” – trees that have already partially fallen and remain hung up in another standing tree.

“Widowmakers can be especially dangerous, as they can fall to the ground at any moment,” he said. “They constantly have gravity pulling on them and become more dangerous with time.”

Cousineau says that in beetle-kill areas of Grand, Summit and Jackson counties, many of the standing trees have been dead up to a decade or longer. These dead trees are experiencing normal decay processes and are now breaking off at ground level and often without warning, such as the loud popping noise typically associated with a falling tree. He adds that there have already been several reported cases of tents, homes, vehicles and other property being struck by falling snags.

The CSFS offers the following tips to avoid harm from falling trees:

- Refrain from visiting beetle-kill areas in high-wind conditions or when strong winds are forecast.
- Remove standing dead trees in the vicinity of houses and other structures.
- If the wind picks up when you’re outside, move to a clearing away from dead or exposed trees.
- Locate campsites, parked vehicles and tents well away from dead trees.
- If possible, steer clear of remote roads that pass through beetle-kill forests, as trees falling across the road after your passage could block your exit.
- Pack a saw or chainsaw when headed into the backcountry to clear fallen trees from roadways.

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