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NEWS

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Grand Junction Forester Participates in Statewide Aerial Survey

GRAND JUNCTION, Colo. – Kelly Rogers, Colorado State Forest Service Grand Junction district forester, was one of only 10 individuals statewide who participated in this year's annual insect and disease detection flights over Colorado. The flights began in early July and continued through mid-September.

Each year, observers with the Colorado State Forest Service and U.S. Forest Service conduct an aerial survey to map insect and disease activity in forested areas. The survey provides images and data that help land managers identify and address forest health concerns.

For the past seven years, Rogers has participated as a "sketchmapper" in the aerial detection survey. He said the survey is a great tool for obtaining a broad impression of forest conditions over large areas.

"The real value of the information we gather is in the trends – being able to compare data from one year to the next," Rogers said.

Based on aerial survey flights Rogers flew earlier this month, spruce bark beetles are the primary concern on Grand Mesa. He says their numbers have been increasing, and there are many potential host trees. Sudden aspen decline (SAD) currently is the most prevalent forest concern on Piñon Mesa, the Uncompahgre Plateau and the slopes surrounding Grand Mesa. Rogers said other bark beetles, such as mountain pine beetle and Douglas-fir beetle, appear to be at normal or endemic levels this year in the areas he surveyed.

In recent years, SAD was a primary forestry concern for the CSFS Grand Junction District, which includes Mesa, Delta, Pitkin, Garfield and Rio Blanco counties. In 2009, more than 120,000 acres in these counties alone showed some level of aspen decline.

"Being able to participate in the aerial detection survey is a valuable tool," Rogers said. "Driving and walking around in the forest, even when you can see across an entire drainage, just doesn't give you the landscape-level perspective that you get from the air."

Before being qualified as a sketchmapper, Rogers completed approximately 100 hours of training, including aviation safety courses.

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“It’s not easy work. Flying in a small plane is not all that comfortable, especially when the weather gets rough,” Rogers said. “You have to figure out exactly where you are, which tree species you’re looking at, what’s wrong with the trees, and then draw the area on a map as you’re going by at over 100 miles an hour.”

Aerial survey results provide estimates of the number of acres affected by recent forest insect and disease activity in Colorado. The official results of the 2010 aerial survey will be available in January.

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