

BEETLES not slowing down

FROM P1

mechanical defense the tree has.”

West hopes the significant amount of snowpack this year will give trees that have yet to be invaded the strength to fight off insect infestations.

In drought years, there isn't enough moisture to create a defensive amount of resin, which allows the bark beetles to waltz in for a buffet. Weakened trees have allowed the beetle populations to boom and molt into an epidemic presence in parts of the state.

Southwest Colorado

The southwest corner of Colorado continues to be significantly impacted by Spruce beetle, with Ouray County also being hit by the White Fir engraver beetle and the Douglas Fir beetle. The CSFS sees the fir engraver threat lessening, but at a cost to the forest. In Ouray County, the CSFS saw impacted acreage decrease from 7,000 acres in 2015 to 3,200 acres in 2016.

“More than half of it has been reduced in just one year,” said West. “We anticipate to see decreases of fir engraver as it starts to deplete that White Fir.”

Despite the decline of the White Fir engraver, Spruce beetles show no sign of slowing down. West said statewide acreage impacted by Spruce beetles is decreasing, but only because the insects are leaving

areas they've already decimated.

“We've kind of seen it taper down in the central portions of Hinsdale and Mineral counties where most of the infestation originally started,” he said. “It's basically picked off all the susceptible trees in those areas and is now moving into new areas that were previously uninfested.”

Beetle kill hazards

Several undesirable results can occur from the insect epidemics, including fire and falling hazards and impacts to the forest ecosystem and hydrologic regime.

When a significant amount of tree mortality occurs in one area, the canopy is reduced. The canopy acts as a thermal cover, and when it starts to dissipate, the sun penetrates any snowpack below. The heat forces the snowpack to melt off earlier, typically in one large chunk in early spring.

The loss of the thermal cover can also impact the wildlife living in the area.

In addition, any fire sparked in a beetle-impacted area could burn more intensely and become harder to control. Recreation areas also become threatening after a beetle infestation.

“(The trees) become a hazard once they've been standing for a couple of years,” said West. “They're no longer wind-sturdy and then we start to worry about campgrounds and places where we invite the public to come.”

Forest service response

The state forest service combats the infestations in a variety of ways, but West said there isn't a one-size-fits-all solution to the overall problem. Pesticides and insecticides are often used to prevent beetles from chewing on the bark, but those measures can be taken only if a water source isn't nearby.

Another preventative measure is pheromone packets, or bubble caps, attached to trees to protect specifically against Douglas Fir beetle.

“It's basically using the chemical communicating against the bark beetle and saying, ‘This tree is full, go somewhere else,’” said West. “It pushes them on to the next area.”

The time between a beetle receiving the ‘No Vacancy’ pheromone signal and finding another host tree can be critical to tree survival. West said the beetles could be preyed upon by birds and other insects in that gap, but it isn't a guaranteed slowdown.

The state forest service also undertakes prior thinning operations to harvest merchantable timber out of an area before the epidemic hits.

Thinning is also conducted following an invasion to gather wood that hasn't degraded to the point of no longer being usable.

Other states suffering

Colorado isn't the only state suffering

from pest outbreaks. Wyoming, California and Utah have also been struck by insect epidemics. West said the entire west side of the country has been suffering from bark beetle impact over the last two decades.

Compared to other impacted states, West said, it's just Colorado's turn for the beetle epidemic.

“Utah had Spruce beetle problems before we did and we had Mountain Pine beetle before some of the other states,” he said. “It's just a matter of coupling this perfect window of the amount of beetles in an area versus the susceptibility of trees in the area.”

The future of the epidemic

When asked what the Spruce beetle outbreak will look like in the next five to 10 years, West said the state forest service anticipates continued tree mortality as the epidemic expands from the main outbreak site. Douglas Fir beetle is also expected to continue its expansion, now affecting 19,000 acres statewide. However, he said, the state forest service is optimistic.

“Spread the message to be aware, especially when you're in areas where there's dead trees from bark beetles. They do pose a hazard for felling and wind,” said West. “We hope precipitation keeps coming on and we hope to see a turnaround in the outbreak in the near future.”

OURAY COUNTY

Fairgrounds preparing for 100-year rodeo anniversary

BY DALTON CARVER
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This year is the 100th anniversary of the first documented rodeo and fair event at the Ouray County Fairgrounds, and manager Susan Long wants to make it memorable. Long informed county commissioners of her tentative plan and requested financial help as it comes to fruition, during the call to the public segment of the Board of County Commissioners meeting at the 4-H Event Center last Tuesday, Jan. 31.

Long said she's planning various aspects of celebration, including a promotion involving bumper stickers. If it is financially feasible, the fairgrounds will request local businesses to donate gift certificates that will be used as prizes with a numbered bumper sticker given away by the fairgrounds. Using a door prize format, the bumper sticker promotion will allow sticker purchasers to win business gift cards if their sticker is selected. Along with the reward to participants, Long believes it will be a useful promotional tool for the anniversary. She plans to have the promotion up and running this April, if the idea works out.

“Once you get these (bumper stickers) out, people will be driving all over the place,” she said Tuesday. “It will be really good, broad marketing for our 100-year anniversary.”

Long said she plans to look for sponsors for funding the fair and rodeo, as she does each year, but requested help from the BOCC if not everything goes according to

plan. The fairgrounds manager didn't have a final plan for monetary support, but will approach commissioners again as plans for the anniversary event progress.

“We've done a lot of groundwork at this point, but I have nothing permanent to offer you right now,” said Long. “If I can't find a sponsor, I'd like to have your help in having us do it and then raise funds.”

Although promising no money at the time, commissioners thought the overall idea is “exciting” and will take steps as the anniversary plan moves forward.

Uncompahgre Watershed Partnership requests support

Scott Williams, representing the Uncompahgre Watershed Partnership, also made a short presentation during call to the public Tuesday. Williams requested county support, through a letter, on a grant proposal to the Bureau of Reclamation for a fourth mine remediation project. UWP hopes to work at the Humble Mine site at the upper Governor Basin.

“There's some intermittent drainage flowing through waste rock and picking up some bad stuff,” said Williams. “Eventually, (the drainage) reaches Sneffels Creek.”

In the grant proposal, UWP is partnering with Trout Unlimited, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, the United States Forest Service and Ouray Silver Mines. Williams said the project budget hasn't been finalized at this point, but UWP is anticipating \$80,000 in total project cost. Williams said

the grant deadline is Feb. 15.

To meet the deadline, Commissioner Don Batchelder suggested BOCC chair Ben Tisdell sign the support letter and schedule

ratification for the next regular meeting. The board agreed and Tisdell signed the letter of support.

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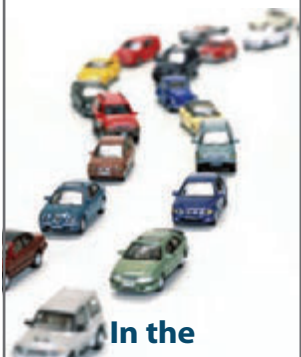


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In the Plaindealer Classifieds

The Ouray County Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC)

will meet on

February 6, 2017, 10:20 a.m.

Ouray County Land Use Building
111 Mall Road, Ridgway, CO

The agenda includes a briefing on the Federal Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know Act (EPCRA) presented by a member of the Colorado Emergency Planning Commission (CEPC). An update on the 2016 legislative changes related to the Designated Emergency Response Authority (DERA) also will be discussed. The meeting is open to the public. Local business owners who may store, sell or use chemicals which are considered hazardous materials are encouraged to attend.

