



## News Release



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### **Aerial Survey Shows Mountain Pine Beetle Epidemic Declining, Spruce Beetle Numbers Escalating**

**GOLDEN, Colo., Jan. 30, 2014,** – The US Forest Service and Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS) today released the results of the annual aerial forest health survey in Colorado, which indicate that the spread of the mountain pine beetle epidemic has slowed dramatically, while the spruce beetle outbreak continues to expand. Each summer the agencies work together to aerially monitor insect and disease-caused tree mortality or damage across Colorado forestland.

The mountain pine beetle epidemic slowed again in 2013, with the lowest acreage of active infestation observed in 15 years. Statewide, mountain pine beetle was active on 97,000 acres in 2013. This brings the total infestation to 3.4 million acres in Colorado since the first signs of the outbreak in 1996.

The spruce beetle outbreak was active on 398,000 acres across the state, expanding by 216,000 new acres in 2013, compared to 183,000 new acres in 2012. The total area affected by this beetle since 1996 has reached more than 1.1 million acres.

Conversely, aspen forest conditions in the state have continued to improve. The aerial survey indicates that although there is continued mortality following drought in the early 2000s, the decline has slowed, with only 1,200 acres impacted in 2013.

“Through our collaborative efforts we are improving the health of our public lands. Our continuing work on the land, together with other agencies, partners and the wood products industry will allow for the treatment of more acres in need of restoration at an increased pace,” said Dan Jirón, Regional Forester for the Rocky Mountain Region of the US Forest Service. “Restoring forest health and resiliency is a top regional priority, and is guiding much of the work on the forests. In 2013, these National Forest projects in this Region led to enough timber harvested to construct 25,000 homes.”

“Bark beetles and other forest health concerns don’t recognize property boundaries, so it’s critical for land managers and private landowners to work together to address forest management across federal, state and private lands,” said Mike Lester, State Forester and Director of the CSFS. “The Colorado State Forest Service provides private landowners, who are the stewards of most non-federal lands in Colorado, the tools they need to improve forest health and achieve their management objectives.”

The US Forest Service is taking action to address the bark beetle infestations. The Rocky Mountain Region is focused on increasing the pace and scale of active forest management across Colorado. Each National Forest is stepping up forest treatments, and many are working collaboratively to strategically plan and apply work to the areas that need it most. The US Forest Service now has four 10-year stewardship contracts to remove dead trees to restore forests and increase their resiliency. The US

Forest Service has also awarded several short-term stewardship contracts aimed at improving forest health and adding to local economies.

One example is the recently operational Gypsum biomass plant. The plant converts wood chips from beetle-killed trees into enough electricity to run the plant and pump an additional 10 megawatts into the Holy Cross Energy Facility, which powers approximately 55,000 customers in Eagle, Pitkin, Garfield, Gunnison and Mesa counties. Much of the wood the plant will process will come from beetle-killed trees from the White River National Forest.

Forestry agencies have a key role in sustaining forest ecosystems, which provide many benefits to the people of Colorado and many surrounding states. Whether progress is measured by the reduction of large-scale wildfires, timber harvested or number of forest acres treated; the outcome is the same: healthy and resilient forests, and the protection of forested watersheds.

While the US Forest Service takes action on National Forest lands, the CSFS works with private landowners to help them meet their management objectives to achieve healthy forests. The agency will release a new quick guide on the spruce beetle by April, and in 2013 held educational public meetings about the beetle for citizens in Chaffee, Custer, Fremont, Huerfano, Lake, Las Animas, Pueblo and Saguache counties.

For further information on forest health conditions in the Rocky Mountain Region, visit <http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/r2/forest-grasslandhealth>

For information directed at private landowners to help manage for healthier forests, visit [www.csfs.colostate.edu](http://www.csfs.colostate.edu).

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*The mission of the U.S. Forest Service is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations. The agency manages 193 million acres of public land, provides assistance to state and private landowners, and maintains the largest forestry research organization in the world. Public lands the Forest Service manages contribute more than \$13 billion to the economy each year through visitor spending alone. Those same lands provide 20 percent of the nation's clean water supply, a value estimated at \$27 billion per year. The agency has either a direct or indirect role in stewardship of about 80 percent of the 850 million forested acres within the U.S., of which 100 million acres are urban forests where most Americans live.*

*The Colorado State Forest Service is the lead state agency for providing forest stewardship and management, fuels reduction and wildfire mitigation assistance to private landowners in Colorado. Every year, the CSFS helps treat 20,000 acres of forestland, and assists approximately 6,400 landowners and hundreds of communities to help improve forest health. The CSFS is a service and outreach agency of the Warner College of Natural Resources at Colorado State University.*