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NEWS

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Foresters Expect Third Year of Heavy Spruce Budworm Activity in Teller County

WOODLAND PARK, Colo. – The Colorado State Forest Service Woodland Park District anticipates a third straight year of heavy western spruce budworm activity in Teller County, the western edge of El Paso County and eastern Park County, based on aerial survey data and on-the-ground observations. The budworm is a concern because it defoliates Douglas-fir, Engelmann spruce and Colorado blue spruce, with the potential to consume most new growth on host trees. During outbreaks of three or more successive years, affected trees may sometimes die.

A native insect to North America, the western spruce budworm is a widely distributed defoliator throughout the West. In the Pikes Peak region, Douglas-fir and Engelmann spruce are the preferred host trees.

Michael Till, assistant district forester with the CSFS Woodland Park District, says that western spruce budworm in Teller, El Paso and Park counties is cyclical and should run its course naturally. Although tree mortality can arise due to multi-year attacks, he says it is not a common occurrence here.

“But the activity could be an indication that tree densities are too high, and that our local forests have not experienced adequate management,” he said. “This is partly due to human expansion into forested areas, and a lack of recurring wildland fire to thin out excess regeneration.”

Besides taking no action, management options for the budworm include removing tree regeneration and thinning out residual trees, to increase vigor and available resources for trees left standing; and spraying high-value trees with regulated insecticides two weeks after bud break (near the beginning of June).

The western spruce budworm has a one-year life cycle, in which it develops from egg to adult. Adults are rusty-brown moths and appear from late June through August. After mating, the adult female lays eggs on spruce needles, and 10 days later the larvae hatch to then hibernate for the winter in bark crevasses and tree canopies. In April or May, the larvae migrate to green foliage and feed on old needles before moving on to new needle growth, and soon after becoming adult moths.

Budworm populations usually are kept under control by a combination of natural factors, including predators, parasites, climatic conditions and insufficient food supplies.

For more information, go to <http://csfsc.colostate.edu> or call the CSFS Woodland Park District at (719) 687-2921.