

News Release

CLEVELAND NATIONAL FOREST

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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New Insect (the Gold-spotted Oak Borer) Threatens Oaks in San Diego County

San Diego, August 15, 2008... For the past seven years, Oak decline has been evident in eastern San Diego County near the communities of Descanso and Pine Valley. Current oak tree mortality levels are reaching 10% and higher in woodlands on and near the Descanso Ranger District of the Cleveland National Forest.

Over the past few months, Forest Service entomologist Tom Coleman discovered that damage was due to the feeding activity of a new insect to California. The insect does not yet have an official name, but is tentatively being called the “Gold-spotted Oak borer,” *Agrilus coxalis*. This beetle is among a group of boring insects called metallic woodborers, flatheaded borers, or jewel beetles.

Field studies conducted by Coleman to see why the oak trees have been dying, led to the discovery that the gold-spotted oak borer may have been inadvertently introduced to the region or has expanded its range from other parts of the county or neighboring countries. The beetle is the reason why deaths in live and black oaks from the community of Alpine; east to Mt Laguna; and north to Julian have been happening in such large numbers. Prior to the discovery of the beetle, drought was thought to be the cause of oak deaths. As many as 70% of the oak trees in these areas are infested.

“With the work that Tom did, we are now able to create specific projects aimed at eliminating the beetles and saving our oak trees,” said Will Metz, Forest Supervisor for the Cleveland National Forest. These oak trees do not resprout, resulting in degraded wildlife habitat and potentially tree stand type conversion away from oak trees and more towards shrub or brush vegetation types. The dead oak trees also contribute to hazardous fuel accumulations.

Evidence of insect attacks on oak trees can be seen by the presence of the insect under the bark, D-shaped exit holes in the bark, woodpecker foraging, and bark staining on the trunk of the tree and larger branches.

Confirmation of the gold-spotted oak borer’s work has been found in the areas of Pine Valley, Guatay, Descanso, Laguna Mountain and Cuyamaca State Park. “It is not only Forest Service lands that have been impacted by the loss of the oak trees” said Will Metz, “based on Coleman’s

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work, the public and our partner agencies can now focus our efforts towards saving our oak trees across San Diego County”.

For more information about the gold-spotted oak borer, a public meeting will be hosted by the Forest Service in October (time and location to be determined). If you are interested in attending, please check the Cleveland National Forest website in September for details, or call the Descano Ranger District at 619-445-6235. Until then, there are things you can do to reduce or prevent gold-spotted oak borer attacks. These guidelines have been adopted from similar wood boring species, but have not been tested specifically on the gold-spotted oak borer. Applying these methods does not guarantee tree survival.

- How do we keep the from spreading?
 - o Do not transport oak firewood or logs to limit the spread of insects.
 - o Remove the bark from infested oak trees and cover with a tarp or expose the wood to direct sunlight to reduce populations.
 - o Chip oak wood
 - o Remove dead or recently dying oaks with heavy infestations to limit localized growth of the beetle population.
- Prevention and Suppression: How can we protect healthy tree?
 - o Reduce the number of trees in an area to promote individual tree health and defenses.
 - o Spray high-value trees to reduce attacks with insecticide.
 - o Inject systemic insecticides. These insecticides travel throughout the tree’s system so that insects are killed when they feed on the tree’s sap.

Homeowners may call the California Department of Agriculture at 619-698-0211 or the University of California Extension office at 858-694-3897 for additional information about protecting oak trees on private land.