



Dwarf Mistletoe Treatments

Los Padres National Forest
Pacific Southwest Region

Coniferous forests in Southern California are extremely valuable, being found in only a small portion of the landscape. Trees lost to insects, disease or fire take many decades to replace. The Los Padres National Forest has a successful on-going project to maintain healthy trees at six Forest Service campgrounds plus seven organization camps that operate under special use permit in Kern and Ventura counties.



Dwarf mistletoe is a parasitic plant that seriously weakens infected trees and makes them susceptible to mortality by insects or pathogens. Dwarf mistletoe spreads by shooting out its sticky seeds over short distances. Pruning of infected branches can control the spread of dwarf mistletoe and extend the life span of ancient trees by decades.

Los Padres National Forest has continued a mistletoe control program for the past seven years, funded by State and Private Forestry. The program has significantly improved the health of irreplaceable trees. Treatments consist of identifying infected trees, pruning infected limbs, removing severely infected trees, and chipping slash or making it available for campers to burn. The results are healthy stands which are more resistant to insects and disease, reduced ladder-fuels which makes trees less susceptible to crown fire, and better drought-tolerance.



Environmental analysis is currently underway to expand the mistletoe treatment areas to include more high-value conifer stands that are so important to recreation areas and adjacent communities. About 8,000 acres are being studied, using funding from State and Private Forestry. Treatments being considered include thinning, pruning, mastication, and prescribed fire to maintain healthy forests with large, mature trees.

Contact: John Kelly, Mt. Pinos Ranger District, (661) 245-3731.

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