News Release

Monongahela National Forest

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Contact: David Ede at
304-636-1800 x 233

Monongahela National Forest Gypsy Moth Treatment Proposal Available for Comment

(Elkins, WV) Details of a project to treat an area of the Monongahela affected by gypsy moths are now available for public review and comment. The gypsy moth, which was accidentally introduced into the United States in 1869 in New England has since becoming a major defoliator of trees. Forestry officials throughout the northeast and mid-Atlantic states keep a close eye on building populations and treat when necessary to reduce the numbers of the pest and its negative effects.

Because populations of the moth have increased in parts of the Monongahela National Forest in Pocahontas and Greenbrier Counties, Forest Service officials are planning treatment of approximately 12,000-13,000 acres of national forest system lands in those counties. The planned treatment area is bounded by Calvin Price State Forest on the north, the Greenbrier River on the west, Interstate 64 on the south, and the West Virginia-Virginia border on the east. The treatments were originally considered on up to 21,000 acres of FS lands; but that acreage has been reduced based on the results of fall egg mass surveys which were used to identify the most critical areas.

Monongahela officials are concerned that, without treatment, moth infestations in this area will reach high enough levels to cause tree mortality. Gypsy moth caterpillars defoliated trees in the identified area in both 2007 and 2008. Large numbers of caterpillars are expected again in 2009. It is likely that many already stressed trees will not be able to withstand an additional heavy defoliation and will die. Water quality, recreation experiences, wildlife habitat, and timber production could all be negatively affected. Excessive mortality may reduce visual quality around Lake Sherwood, surrounding trails, and along major travel corridors including Interstate 64, US Highway 219, and State Highway 92.

The planned treatment consists of two aerial applications of one or more biological controls. These are the pesticide Gypchek; a biological virus known as NPV which predominately affects gypsy moth; and a bacteria known as Btk, which affects young caterpillars of some species of moths and butterflies with minimum effects on other insects and animals.

MORE

Environmental analysis documents and maps are available on the Monongahela National Forest web site at www.fs.fed.us/r9/mnf, where they will be listed under the Forest Planning page, under proposed actions. The public is invited to comment on the planned actions until January 10th, 2009. A decision is expected in mid-winter of 2009.

Comments may be e-mailed to comments-eastern-monongahela@fs.fed.us and should reference the gypsy moth proposal in the subject line.

The gypsy moth truly earns its name. Adult moths do fly but not long distances. The young caterpillars are spread by the wind, which blows the silken threads they exude, creating a parachute effect. Movement by this mechanism tends to be slow. Man however, has sped the process up considerably, by unwittingly transporting the pest as eggs or caterpillars in loads of firewood, or RVs and campers, and in the bumpers of cars. Local forestry officials caution against the transport of firewood into or out of the State because pests such as the gypsy moth and emerald ash borer may be in or on the wood. Non-native pests such as these have potentially devastating economic effects. Owners of RVs and campers are asked to thoroughly inspect and wash their equipment before moving it. Even with all of these cautions the moth has, and will continue to spread, leaving site specific treatments as the only way to keep it from population explosions and resulting tree mortality.

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