

# USDA Forest Service Update

## July 2014

### Subject: Western Bark Beetles

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**Issue:** Across the landscape from the West Coast through the Rocky Mountains, bark beetles have affected more than 41.7 million acres of conifer forests since 1997. The National Insect and Disease Risk Map indicate that 20 million acres are at risk of 25 percent or more mortality from western bark beetles between 2006 and 2021.

#### **Background:**

- The western United States is experiencing the largest bark beetle outbreak in recorded history. A combination of drought, homogeneous stand conditions and warming winter temperatures has resulted in forests being susceptible to bark beetle outbreaks.
- In July 2011, the Forest Service released a science-based strategy in response to the bark beetle infestation across forests of the interior west to ensure these forests provide healthy watersheds, stimulate local economies, are resilient to a changing climate and are ecologically restored over time. This strategy covers Fiscal Year (FY) 2011 through 2016.
- The strategy focuses agency resources towards three goals: safety, recovery and resilience. Providing for human safety in areas threatened by standing dead hazard trees and addressing dead and down trees that create hazardous fuels conditions adjacent to high value areas is top priority. After the priority of safety, forested areas with severe mortality are reforested with the appropriate species (recovery). Forests are also thinned to reduce the number of trees per acre and create more diverse stand structures to minimize extensive epidemic bark beetle areas (resiliency).
- The Forest Service will maintain an annual funding level of approximately \$101.5 million (FY 2011 - FY 2016) assuming appropriations in the out-years remain equal to the FY 2010 level.

#### **Key Points:**

- The Forest Service is aggressively implementing projects to mitigate the effects of the bark in Regions 1-6 under the 2011 Western Bark Beetle Strategy.
- The Forest Service spent \$104.1 million supporting safety, forest recovery, and long term forest resiliency activities in FY 2013.
- Bark beetle mitigation accomplishments during FY 2013 included:
  - a total of 259,710 treated acres;
  - hazard tree removal on 532 miles of roads and trails;
  - 235 million board feet of timber sold;
  - 50,544 green tons of biomass produced; and
  - 32 research tools developed to increase the effectiveness of forest management practices towards bark beetle mitigation in the future.
- The health and safety as well as ecological problems created by this ever-expanding infestation far exceed the capacity of the Forest Service to fully address. Future collaborations and partnerships will facilitate the long-term bark beetle mitigation across all ownerships.

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