

### **Pine Beetle Management in Alberta**

The Mountain Pine Beetle (MPB) is the most destructive native insect pest of mature lodgepole pine forests in Canada. British Columbia is currently experiencing a mountain pine beetle epidemic throughout the range of lodgepole pine forests in the Province. Alberta is also experiencing an unprecedented expansion of MPB populations into the pine forests along the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains that could expand east to the boreal forest.

In Western Canada the Natural range of MPB is expanding and Alberta is experiencing infestations in areas where they historically have not occurred. The epidemic is the result of a number of factors including successive mild winters, an over abundance of mature pine forests and the natural beetle population cycles.

In Alberta, the Mountain Pine Beetle (MPB) is currently confined to the foothills of western Alberta, north to southern Wilmore Wilderness area, and in the Cypress Hills of southeastern Alberta and southwestern Saskatchewan. The main host is lodgepole pine, but whitebark pine and limber pine have also been attacked in Alberta. It is highly likely that jack pine is also a suitable host.

Timing is critical to effectively control a MPB infestation. Early detection is key as treatment of the infested tree areas at the outset of an infestation is the only proven control method. If an infestation is not controlled early the result could be widespread and disastrous such as the one in BC. Funding for research, planning and long term ecosystem management is of high priority. Issues such as hazard tree management, post epidemic pine deadfall, fuel hazard reduction and wildfire management, maintenance of recreation values and management of adjacent access will require continuing efforts from protected area managers.

Prevention of MPB outbreaks requires a long-term and comprehensive forest management plan to reduce tree and stand susceptibility to MPB. Alberta is currently working on an action plan to reduce the susceptibility of pine forests before MPB arrive. Removing susceptible prime brooding stands will help mitigate the MPB population establishment growth and spread. Slowing the progress of the population will assist with direct control efforts.

The Alberta government has recently directed \$50 million in emergency funding to continue aggressive action against the mountain pine beetle infestation in the province.

Beetle-attacked trees in Alberta jumped to an estimated three million in early 2007 - compared to 20,000 a year earlier - following a 'beetle rain' last July from populations in northeastern British Columbia.

The \$50 million in emergency funding from Sustainable Resource Development's 2007-08 budget will be used for control measures to remove beetle-killed and at-risk trees, and to continue surveys to detect infestations.

The ministry's goal is to remove as many infested trees as possible before the next beetle flight this July. Each infested tree contains enough beetles to attack five to 10 more trees. At risk are six million hectares of pine forest in Alberta - about 15 per cent of the province's total forest - as well as the viability of the province's forest industry, sustainability of communities, watersheds, crucial wildlife habitat, recreational access and tourism.

The Alberta Chambers of Commerce supports the goals and directions of the Pine Beetle Action Plan but The Alberta Chambers of Commerce are concerned that the implementation plans for the strategies do not include other key elements critical in dealing with this issue.

Therefore:

**The Alberta Chambers of Commerce recommends that the Government of Alberta ;**

- 1) Continue their current funding commitments and lobby The Government of Canada for similar funding to address MPB in our province.
- 2) Form alliances with other Provinces in its attack to mitigate the impact of mountain pine beetle will have on our province and provinces eastward moving into the future.
- 3) Work with non governmental fish and game, and environmental associations in addressing this epidemic and its impact on natural resources and its environment.
- 4) Assess the epidemic's impact on communities that are dependent on harvesting lodge-pole pine and develop economic and social strategies to diversify the economic base of the affected communities to ensure that they continue to be strong and viable communities.
- 5) Lobby the Government of Canada and Parks Canada to better manage forests to help mitigate problems coming out of national parks.

Presented by Red Deer Chamber Of Commerce and Grande Prairie Chamber of Commerce