

Congressman John T. Salazar
Hearing on Mountain Pine Beetles – Strategies for Protecting the West
June 16, 2009

Thank you Chairman Grijalva and Ranking member Bishop, and Chairwoman Napolitano and Ranking member McMorris Rodgers for having this hearing today. I am honored to be a part of it.

The Mountain pine beetle epidemic in Colorado and throughout the West is devastating. It is destroying our forests and threatening our communities.

I have some pictures I'd like to share with you and to submit for the record.

(Picture 1) This picture gives you an idea of the magnitude of the problem we're dealing with. The red trees you see in this picture are dead.

Ninety percent of the trees in this picture are dead.

These next 2 pictures shows the magnitude of the impact to our recreation areas, one of the economic mainstays of Colorado.

(Picture 2) This is the picture of one of our campgrounds in Steamboat Springs as the mountain pine beetle went the area.

(Picture 3) This is what it looks like after the Colorado State Forest Service removed the hazardous trees.

(Picture 4) This picture shows dead trees by a power line. Imagine what would happen to that power line if a fire like this went through. (Picture 5)

(Picture/Map 6) This map demonstrates how far reaching the epidemic in Colorado is.

It is over 2 million acres and growing.

We have over 633 miles of electrical transmission lines just in Colorado that are in areas of dead or dying trees.

We also have over 1300 miles of electrical distribution lines at risk from falling trees or fire.

A large fire could destroy many of these lines, causing power outages for months.

While a wildfire is just a matter of when, falling trees are occurring now on trails, rancher's fences, campgrounds, and powerlines.

How long before one of those falling trees kill someone? Already we've had to close campgrounds and trails because of the hazards.

We need to do something to ensure our communities, watersheds and power and communication infrastructure is safe.

We also need to be looking into the future.

At the health of our industries - small and large - that utilize the dead trees.

At keeping our future forests healthy so epidemics such as this are less likely to happen.

(Picture 7) This picture shows where several years ago trees were harvested for water distribution research.

The areas that are green were harvested many years ago and grew back. Those younger, healthy trees were not attacked by the mountain pine beetle.

The areas that are red were not harvested. Those trees were not as healthy and died.

I am looking forward to hearing what the 2nd and 3rd panels are doing to avoid an almost certain catastrophe.

I also want to hear suggestions for actions Congress should take.

As this committee knows, I, along with several members of the Colorado delegation, have introduced legislation the last several Congresses addressing different approaches to tackle this problem.

Our delegation is currently working on a bill we plan to introduce this summer.

I welcome your ideas on the most strategic approaches we can make to protect our communities and natural resources.

I'd like to thank the leadership on the committee for addressing this critical issue.

Thank you and I yield back the remainder of my time.