

San Luis Valley Public Lands Center



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NEWS RELEASE

--FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE--

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Drought Causing Insect Outbreaks

(Monte Vista) The Rio Grande National Forest is currently experiencing widespread forest insect outbreaks that are causing hundreds of thousands of trees to die. Insects that attack trees are always present in the forest, but recently there has been a marked increase in their numbers and the acres of forest being impacted.

"We are seeing pockets of insect outbreaks in all forest types in several areas of the Forest," said John Murphy, Rio Grande National Forest's timber program manager. "The outbreaks are primarily due to our on-going drought."

Tom Eager, an entomologist for the Rocky Mountain Region of the Forest Service, added, "The Rio Grande National Forest is not the only Forest being hit by these 'agents of change.' Insect outbreaks have increased throughout the entire Rocky Mountain Region." Eager calls insects that kill trees, "agents of change," because when they reach high enough numbers they cause significant changes to the composition of the forest.

The insect outbreaks are occurring at all elevations of the Forest. In the lower elevations, ips beetles are starting to move into some of the pinyon pine. At mid-elevations, occurrences of mountain pine beetle and Douglas-fir beetle are on the rise. The largest insect outbreak on the Rio Grande National Forest is located in the upper elevations of the Conejos Peak District. Over 1000 acres in the "County Line" area have been heavily impacted by the spruce bark beetle.

According to Murphy, the Forest is planning to salvage bug-killed trees in areas where logging is appropriate. Additionally, pro-active management techniques are being planned for several areas in an effort to reduce the spread of bark beetles adjacent to outbreaks.

"Insect outbreaks as we are presently experiencing are part of a natural cycle," said Murphy. "We will try to slow them down in areas where resource

objectives are being compromised by the death of the trees. At the Forest-wide level they will run their natural course... whatever that may be.”

For more information about the forest insect outbreaks on the Rio Grande National Forest, contact: 719-852-5941.

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