Conservation Corner

*Conservation Corner is a weekly article produced by the Forest County Land &Water Conservation Department. For more information contact Steve Kircher, County Conservationist-Land Information/GIS Director at 715-478-1387 or by e-mail at* *lcc@co.forest.wi.us**.*

I had a property owner from the North end of Forest County call the other day and inform me of a Spruce Beetle infestation.  Bark beetles are found throughout Wisconsin. Their ranges vary with each beetle species and its preferred host tree(s).  Common conifer bark beetle species include:pine engraver *(Ips pini),* red turpentine beetle *(Dendroctonus valens),* chestnut-brown bark beetle (*Pityogenes hopkinsi*), spruce beetle *(Dendroctonus rufipennis),* eastern larch beetle *(Dendroctonus simplex),* and balsam fir bark beetle *(Pityokteines sparsus).*

Many species of bark beetles attack conifers in Wisconsin. Most prefer to attack only one or a few host species of conifers. Bark beetles can attack trees under stress; stress can be caused by overcrowding, drought, flood, damage from other insects, disease, changes in the water table, wounds, fire, storm damage and thinning during a drought. Bark beetles may also attack trees that are dying, freshly cut trees, and logging debris. Stressed trees are more vulnerable to bark beetle attack because their defensive mechanisms are compromised. Healthy conifers produce large quantities of pitch that often prevents bark beetle attacks.  Occasionally, extremely large populations of bark beetles are able to mass attack and overwhelm the defenses of healthy trees.

Adult beetles emerge in spring after spending the winter in the layer of needles and other debris on top of the soil or from an infested tree. Beetles bore into a tree, mate and lay eggs. Fungi that may impact tree health are sometimes introduced during colonization. Larvae hatch and feed beneath the bark creating galleries that disrupt the flow of water and nutrients in the tree. Some species, such as the pine engraver (*Ips pini*) complete development rapidly (in as little as 30 days) and go through multiple generations per year. Other species, including the spruce beetle *(Dendroctonus rufipennis),* take up to two years to complete their life cycle. Warmer temperatures allow beetles to develop more quickly whereas cooler weather will lengthen the cycle. Populations of bark beetles can build up rapidly in hot, dry years.

The signs and symptoms of a bark beetle invasion include:

* Individual or groups of trees with light green, straw yellow, red or brown foliage. Brown, dead
needles and tree mortality may occur abruptly.
* Small, round exit holes in the bark or pitch tubes near the base of the tree.

• Feeding galleries (tunnels) under the bark.

• Fine dust in bark crevices, at the base of the tree, or on understory plants.

Prevention practices include:

* Conducting sustainable forest management activities such as thinning
stands at the proper time to maintain healthy, vigorous trees.
* Avoid  stressing conifers in multiple ways, such as thinning during a drought,
whenever possible.
* Remove harvested logs within three weeks of being cut during the months of
March through September.

Management strategies will vary depending on the bark beetle species, host species, and site conditions. Recommendations for managing conifer bark beetles may include:

* If trees are stressed from drought, storm damage, or disease consider a pre-salvage harvest.
* Promptly salvage trees that are severely damaged by storms, fire, disease, insects, or other destructive agents before bark beetles have a chance to infest them.
* Harvest conifers during winter or when bark beetles are not active.  Remove cut logs and tops down to 2 inches in diameter from the site by March if cut during the winter, or within three weeks of being cut from March through September.
* Logging debris remaining on the site should be left attached to the main stem, scattered into openings, or driven over to break it up and allow faster drying.
* Minimize damage to remaining trees during logging operations.  Avoid large wounds, soil compaction and root injury which can stress trees and attract bark beetles.
* Plant site-appropriate conifer species, taking into consideration soil types and other factors that impact tree health and survival.