

aspendailynews online

Published on Aspen Daily News Online (<http://www.aspendailynews.com>)

Logging beetle kill won't reduce outbreaks, report says

Writer:

David Frey

Byline:

Aspen Daily News Correspondent

A report released Tuesday by a pair of university researchers and two scientists working for conservation organizations finds that efforts to log beetle-killed trees in the backcountry won't reduce fire risk or beetle outbreaks.

The report found that bark beetle outbreaks may not lead to greater fire risk, and that thinning the trees won't keep the beetles from spreading.

"The primary driver of fire is not beetle kill. It's climate," said Barry Noon, a wildlife ecology professor at Colorado State University and an author of the report. "It's drought and temperature."

The report warns against using tax dollars to fund widespread forest-thinning efforts, particularly in roadless areas that have been off-limits to logging.

Instead, the authors encourage efforts to be focused around the edges of communities.

"We're certainly not arguing against cutting down some of these trees, but we think that the cutting effort needs to be focused around communities and homes," Noon said. "It makes little sense to have wide scale cutting of these trees."

Last year, the city of Aspen and Pitkin County pitched in for the \$110,000 cost to treat trees on Smuggler Mountain in an effort to combat the spread of beetles there to save the green backdrop and reduce the danger of falling trees for hikers. Crews used the hormone Verbenone, believed to discourage beetles from boring into trees, and cut down 202 affected trees in an effort to stem the tide of destructive pine bark beetles. The group For the Forest, which pushed for the effort, said preliminary results showed the effort to be effective.

That kind of operation may be appropriate, Noon said. Communities can effectively reduce trees that could be dangerous, he said, but trying to fight off the beetles across large acreages does little good.

"It makes sense to focus efforts around homes and communities and buildings," he said. "If that's the primary goal, then that can be accomplished in a real straightforward fashion."

The report was authored by Noon; Clark University professor Dominik Kulakowski; Scott Black, executive director of the Xerces Center for Invertebrate Conservation; and Dominick DellaSala, president and chief scientist for the National Center for Conservation Science and Policy.

The report found that beetle-killed trees have little impact on fire danger because they drop their dead

needles within three years, reducing the fuel in the tree crowns that often causes forest fires to spread.

The authors warned that cutting roads into current roadless areas could bring much more harm to wildlife, soil and fisheries than the beetle-killed trees pose to the forest.

The report comes amid Colorado's bid to exempt itself from roadless protections put in place in the waning days of the Clinton administration. Officials say it is needed in part to allow agencies to remove beetle-killed tree to reduce fire danger.

Pine bark beetles have infested millions of acres of lodge pole and ponderosa pines across the West, leaving a swath of brown trees from the Canadian border to the Mexican border.

Colorado received \$30 million in federal money to deal with trees killed by the beetles on 3 million acres. The state received three-quarters of the \$40 million spent across the West.

Most of the money will be spent on the White River, Medicine Bow, Routt and Arapaho-Roosevelt national forests.

dfrey@aspdailynews.com

archive_date:

1 day

Source URL: <http://www.aspdailynews.com/section/home/139500>