

## Beetle carving path to our door

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Nature's lottery has blessed the region with shimmering lakes and stunning cliffs. It will also likely spare us from the most devastating effects of the mountain pine beetle scourge that has ravaged northern British Columbia.

But we are not going to escape it entirely, so we must do everything we can to minimize the potential damage.

The effects of the mountain pine beetle epidemic that has swept across the northern half of the province are well-known. It has coloured large swaths of the interior pine stands red, potentially destroying the future livelihoods of thousands living in resource-reliant communities like Vanderhoof, 100 Mile House and Quesnel.

This catastrophe — and that is the only appropriate word for what has unfolded — is reverberating throughout the province because of its impact on the crucial forestry sector at the heart of our economy.

Yes, mitigation efforts are underway and other sectors of the economy have picked up the slack. But this does not in any way compensate for the damage these critters have caused on their way south and now we are about to get a taste of life under the pine beetle.

Pine trees make up a smaller share of the local fauna, so the effects will not be as visible. Nor is there anything unusual about beetle epidemics. They have happened throughout natural history. Only this time, we are around to record and feel the effects which can be rather harmful.

Beetle-infested trees that are not removed immediately could threaten life and limb, because they may topple over, damaging private homes and public infrastructure like power lines.

That is why we hope private homeowners will complement city efforts to preserve pine trees by informing themselves about the pine beetle. Information gained today — no matter how irrelevant it may appear — can minimize harmful effects tomorrow. We have some advantages. We still have time to learn and prepare. So if you have pine trees, learn how to spot evidence of pine beetle. Report and treat it right away.

The effectiveness of such vigilance is not certain. It all depends on the eventual size and scope of the mountain pine beetle's expected arrival next year. But the invasion is on.