

The Central Peace Signal

Battle with Mountain Pine Beetle continuing

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As of April 1, crews have identified over 56,000 trees infected with the Mountain Pine Beetle and have controlled just over 10,000 in the South Peace municipalities (County of Grande Prairie, MD of Greenview, Saddle Hills County, Birch Hills County and MD of Spirit River).

That does not include another 5,000 that has or will be controlled by landowners.

This fight has cost just over \$1 million so far on the beetle project. "Snow conditions have added greatly to the cost of surveying and control work," said Mountain Pine Beetle coordinator Jerry Bauer.

Two land owners have sold their infected trees to Ainsworth. Hopefully this will create a larger market for infected pine trees this summer and next winter added Bauer. "Ainsworth is experimenting with pine as they generally use aspen," he said. "A summer control plan is being developed and was discussed with the Sustainable Resources Department (SRD) on April 10. Due to the scope and magnitude of the infestation, we need to continue with control work during spring break up and as long into the summer as possible."

A full time administrative assistant started on April 2. The data base is being modified by Erik Kisner to better serve the needs of the South Peace municipalities and SRD. Once completed this will provide better, more accurate and timely information on the status of the project and work completed to date.

The Government of Alberta has committed another \$50 million in emergency funding to continue the aggressive action against the Mountain Pine Beetle throughout the province. Beetle attacked trees in Alberta jumped to an estimated 3 million in early 2007 compared to 20,000 a year earlier following a 'beetle rain' last July from populations in northeastern BC.

The money will go towards control measures to remove beetle killed and at risk trees and to continue surveys to detect infestations. SRD's goal is to remove as many infested trees as possible before the next beetle flight this July. Each infected tree contains enough beetles to attack five to 10 more trees. At risk are six million hectares of pine forest in Alberta which is about 15 percent of the province's total forest.