

**Nothing can stop the mountain pine beetle
It's coming and there's nothing you can do about it.**

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Leader Staff
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That's the message delegates received about the mountain pine beetle during a conference on the much-publicized pest co-hosted by the Grande Alberta Economic Region (GAER), the Community Futures Development Corporation and the Northern Alberta Development Council last Tuesday in Grande Prairie.

Glenn Taylor, GAER chairperson, said the message given by academics at the conference was plain and to the point --we can delay the movement of the beetle but we currently have no means to stop it or kill it. "It was pretty stark -- it was wake up and smell the beetle." Taylor, who's also Hinton's mayor said guest speakers included beetle researchers Allan Carroll of Victoria, B.C. and Dr. Barry Smit of the University of Guelph. The conference helped to reinforce GAER's studies on the mountain pine beetle, which stressed that communities should prepare now for major economic and social impacts caused by beetle infestation and for the aftermath.

Scientists at the conference pretty much admitted that the battle against the beetle was all but lost, Taylor said.

"The scientists popped the balloon of an expectation that it can be stopped by man. It's not going to be stopped naturally and we're not going to be able to stop it. It's going to be Mother Nature basically."

But even Mother Nature had to take a backseat as a climate expert at the conference said this winter will not be harsh enough to kill the beetle, Taylor added.

Scientists have said it would take two weeks of -30 degree weather in order to kill off the beetle.

Taylor had a chance to tour Grande Prairie three weeks ago where he tagged along with Sustainable Resources and Development crews who were going into people's yards on request to eliminate infested trees.

The beetle, which arrived in Grande Prairie last year has shattered many resident's dreams, he said. Taylor said residents of a Grande Prairie County subdivision who had paid major dollars for acreages with ample tree cover were really suffering as a result of the beetle infestation. "They're now looking across the ridge at their neighbour four acres away, six acres away," And the outlook was not looking rosy for future beetle containment as it was predicted the beetle will soon spread to lodgepole pines and jack pines in northwestern Alberta, Taylor said. If that happens it could spread eastward all the way to Newfoundland/ Labrador, he added.

Taylor said 300 million trees were currently affected in Alberta and the beetle was scheduled to reach the flying stage any day now.

Major patches of the Willmore Wilderness Park near Grande Cache were also affected by the beetle infestation.