

Whitecourt Star April 11, 2007

Woodlands County doing their part for beetle infestation

The invasion of the Mountain Pine Beetle into Woodlands County was discussed at the county's April 3 regular meeting. The bug, which is about the size of a grain of rice, has already infested trees in the northwestern and eastern parts of the district and could spread further to cause economic strain.

Nicole Quintal

Star Staff

Wednesday April 11, 2007

Woodlands County Mayor Jim Rennie said in an interview following the meeting that council knows the federal and provincial governments are trying their best to come up with ways to help forestry companies, however, the county must play a role too.

He said Woodlands will do anything they can to help forest companies in the municipalities, but they will also look at the social and social-economic impact that the beetle will have in the area. The county wants to make sure all the primary and secondary players in the forestry industry are on the same page to help with assistance.

"If we go ahead 10 years from now and look backwards, 10 years from now we would have worked it out and things would be rolling along smoothly as they were before," he explained.

"I think that a really important point to make is that the end of the world is not near, but there's going to be a transition period coming up and we need to try to do anything we can to make that smooth."

He added that he doesn't think the county has the full ability to aid the forest companies directly, but that the county can help facilitate opportunities.

"What I mean by (facilitate) is get the people that are involved and are influenced and are going to be affected by the effects of the pine beetle, and see if we can't do any brainstorming to take the opportunities to make the best out of this situation."

In response to the beetle infestation in the region, the 13 municipalities involved with the Grande Alberta Economic Region (GAER) will be meeting for a Mountain Pine Beetle stakeholders meeting on April 17.

"Within our 13 municipalities we want to see if there's anything we can do on more of a grassroots level. One small municipality by itself trying to come up with a solution is going to be hard," Rennie said.

"Waiting for the province to come up with a solution, well they're so big, it's going to also be difficult for them to steer their giant ship and come up with solutions. They will, but it's going to take longer. As a pool of municipalities, we can be in the middle of that. We can have a pooled set of resources."

He added that on the other side of the coin, GAER is small enough to react quickly and that there is a lot at stake, as the pine beetle will affect all of the areas within GAER. Getting the secondary industries and the support groups from the communities together will prove to be important, as well as having resources in place to assist with possible hardships that may occur in the future.

"We already have those resources existing in our community, we just need to make sure that they're being addressed to the right people."

The meeting will not be open to the public.