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(Neb.)-Possible Funding Available For Fight Against Mountain Pine Beetles

By: Roxie Graham-Marski Posted at: 04/18/2012 02:59 PM

(NORTHWEST NEBRASKA)-Nebraska National Forests and Grasslands Acting Forest Supervisor Steve Lenzo and new Pine Ridge district ranger John Griesinger made a visit to the Dawes County commissioner meeting on Wednesday. Griesinger, who has replace Charlie Marsh, comes from the Tucson area and works in environmental engineering. Lenzo said as with many federal and state entities, the Nebraska National Forests and Grasslands agency has seen a decrease in funding, but that it remains committed to serving the area's land management and recreational needs.

Lenzo and Griesinger explained that one area of continued focus for the agency is the fight to stop the spread of mountain pine beetles. Griesinger explained that Nebraska already has some pine beetles, but it is when the beetles reach an epidemic proportion that mass devastation occurs.

"There're a naturally occurring part of the ecosystem. They only become a problem when they reach a size that becomes epidemic in nature. That's what we've seen in Colorado and in the Black Hills. The measures that we are taking here to try to deal with them currently is the three-fold process: to increase stand health, to remove hazardous fuel issues, and to deal with the insects themselves by giving them not the best circumstances in which to reach epidemic levels."

Lenzo said keeping the area's ponderosa pines in optimum health is key in keeping pine beetle numbers down.

"The problem is since we have stands of Ponderosa Pine that are extremely thick. They have low vigor and low health. Those trees are less able to expel the bugs. Through thinning and better management of those stands, they'll be better able to withstand a bark beetle that comes. Presently any mountain pine beetle infested tree that we find, we're cutting those trees down and chucking them up so the adults cannot emerge and infect other trees. We want to avoid at all costs what has happened in the Black Hills and Colorado."

Lenzo said the agency is currently working with the Nebraska Forest Service to apply for grant money in an effort to help landowners stop the spread of the beetles.

"That will be available for private land owners in any areas that border national forest land that could benefit from thinning or hazardous fuel reduction, which also is going to help out with the resiliency so that we can avoid a mountain pine beetle infestation here."

Lenzo said the area around Eagle Eye, which is near the Cookshack and Hudson Meng north of Crawford, is one area in particular the agency is looking at, and there are other areas bordering state lands that may be eligible as well. Lenzo said there also may be state grant money available for helping landowners fight the beetles. For more information, Lenzo recommends contacting Nebraska Forest Service district forester Doak Nickerson at 308-432-6190.

(Questions? Comments? E-mail roxie@chadrad.com.)

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