

Beetles and Collaboration

November 1, 2007

Ted Wang, Mayor, Granby, Colorado

Gary Severson, Executive Director, NWCCOG

Have you been in the High Country of north central Colorado, above 9,000 feet, lately? If you have, you cannot help but to have seen entire mountainsides of dead red trees. What is killing all the trees? It is a native little black beetle, about the size of the head of a kitchen match, called the mountain pine beetle. This little beetle and the billions like it fly every summer and attack the stands of healthy Lodgepole pine trees. The beetles bore into the trees, lay eggs, and introduce a blue stain fungus which blocks the flow of water in the tree, killing it within a year. Current estimates place the number of infected acres at nearly one million in Colorado alone. Many of those acres are experiencing over ninety percent mortality. Although the forest will reseed itself and a new forest will emerge, in the age old cycle of birth, death and regeneration, the potential impacts on the counties, municipalities, and their citizens within the effected area, indeed all of Colorado, can be devastating. Tourism, recreation, water quality and quantity, utility transmission, property values, transportation, construction, and the very essence of Colorado's quality of life are all placed in jeopardy by the little black beetles and their resulting impacts, not the least of which is catastrophic fire.



Willow Creek Pass, Grand County – 2007



Mountain Pine Beetle

Because the mountain pine beetle does not recognize jurisdictional boundaries, lands of all jurisdictions are being affected. The problem is so dispersed and immense that it is impossible for any one level of government to effectively address it. Federal, state, county, municipal entities and agencies, along with private land owners must all work together if any positive results are going to occur.

In 2005, the US Forest Service (USFS), the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS), with municipal and county governments formed a collaborative organization called the Colorado Bark Beetle Cooperative (CBBC). The member jurisdictions of Northwest Colorado Council of Governments asked its Executive Director, Gary Severson, to represent them on the cooperative. As a result, municipalities and counties in the affected areas have worked side-by-side with federal and state agencies to affect federal and state legislation, federal agency funding and

regulatory change, community wildfire protection plans, and local land use codes and ordinances.

Delegations of local mayors and county commissioners, working together, have ventured to Washington, D.C. for meetings with the Department of Agriculture, the Chief of the USFS, and the Colorado congressional delegation, on several occasions. It was on one such trip in the summer of 2006 that a delegation of local mayors and county commissioners, for which Granby Mayor Ted Wang was given the honor and responsibility of being the spokesperson, traveled to D.C. and convinced all nine members of the Colorado congressional delegation to work together on a unified bill addressing the situation. The bill was introduced into the United States Senate and House last June with the entire delegation sponsoring the legislation. In addition, to federal legislation, local mayors and county commissioners, whose jurisdictions participate in the CBBC worked last winter and spring with members of the Colorado State Legislature to introduce two bills and one joint resolution addressing the mountain pine beetle epidemic. All three passed with overwhelming bi-partisan support.

There is much work that remains to be done, but with the collaboration of municipalities working regionally with counties, and state and federal agencies and legislative bodies, we are beginning to see results on the ground. Thanks to dedicated mayors and their councils, boards and staffs we are able to positively address a situation that affects all Coloradans.

***Ted Wang** is Mayor of the Town of Granby, the Chair of Rural Resort Region, a member of the Executive Committee of Northwest Colorado Council of Governments, and member of the Executive Board of the Colorado Municipal league. He serves on the Steering Committee of the CBBC.*

***Gary Severson** is a former employee of the USFS and is the Executive Director of NWCCOG. He is a member of the CBBC Beetle Implementation Team (BITE) which directly coordinates efforts to combat the mountain pine beetle epidemic. He is a strong proponent of collaborative efforts and regional perspectives.*