

WESTERN BARK BEETLE ASSESSMENT
A Framework for Cooperative Forest Stewardship

2009 UPDATE



Promoting science-based forest management that serves the values of society and ensures the health and sustainability of western forests.

Publication Date: March 9, 2009





Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.....	3
Objectives & Background.....	4
A Call to Action	4
Executive Summary	5
The Western Bark Beetle Assessment Is.....	6
The Problem: Unhealthy Forests and Bark Beetle Outbreaks	7
Why are many western forests unhealthy?	7
What factors are causing bark beetle outbreaks?	7
What is the current status of bark beetle outbreaks?	8
What is the future risk of additional bark beetle outbreaks?	9
What is the relationship between bark beetle outbreaks and wildland fire?	10
The Consequences: Public Benefits at Risk	11
What values are at risk?.....	11
What are ecosystem services?	11
The Solution: Strategic and Active Forest Management.....	12
What is the scientific basis for active forest management? ...	12
How do we prioritize acres to actively manage?	12
How do we account for ecological, social, and economic factors?	14
Collaboration and Partnerships Across Boundaries.....	14
Management Strategies	15
Prevention	15
Suppression	16
Restoration.....	17
Research and Outreach	17
Measuring Progress: What Does Success Look Like?	18
Conclusion	19

About the Western Forestry Leadership Coalition

The Western Forestry Leadership Coalition is a State and Federal government partnership. The members of the coalition include: the 23 State and Pacific Island Foresters of the West and the 7 western Regional Foresters, 3 western Research Station Directors, and Forest Products Lab Director of the USDA Forest Service.

This partnership creates a clear voice on western forestry, strengthening our ability to address pertinent issues and help meet the needs of society.

The mission of the WFLC is to promote science-based forest management that serves the values of society and ensures the health and sustainability of western forests.

Acknowledgments

The first edition of the Western Bark Beetle Assessment was published by WFLC in 2002, updated in March of 2007. This update is the third edition of the report. The Coalition's Forest Health and Invasive Species Resource Management Committee initiated this series of update to the Western Bark Beetle Assessment at the 2006 WFLC Spring meeting. The WFLC Executive Board approved the proposal, formalizing it within the committee's work plan.

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Objectives & Background

The first Western Bark Beetle Assessment concluded that, over the next 15 years, 22 million acres of western forest would experience significant tree mortality caused by bark beetles. Seven years later, what has changed? What new data and analysis are available? What have we learned? What has been done to mitigate the costs and effects of this massive tree mortality?

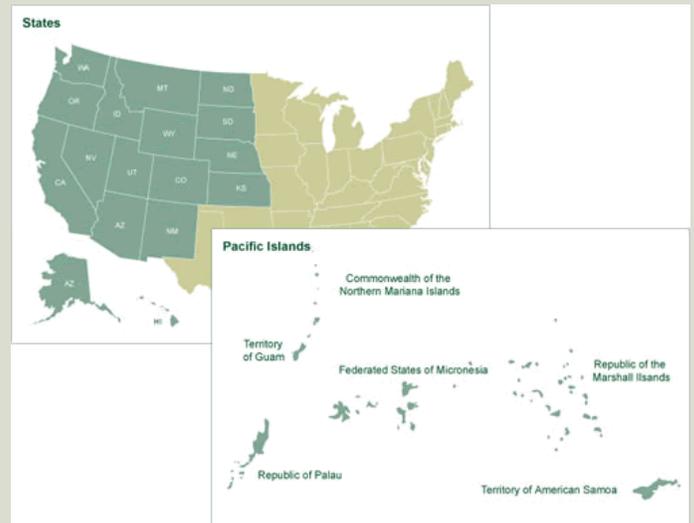
The first update to the assessment in 2007 attempted not only to address these questions, but to provide a framework for cooperative forest stewardship. The ecological as well as political and social landscapes influencing and impacted by bark beetles are changing so quickly, it was not prudent to wait another five years for the next update. The 2009 Update incorporates the latest data, maps, and new information from on-the ground projects.

Consistent across all three editions of the Western Bark Beetle Assessment, our objective is to provide information in a concise and timely manner that can: 1) increase awareness of bark beetle issues and support for bark beetle mitigation efforts, 2) help land managers and communities make decisions concerning bark beetle-damaged forests, and 3) facilitate informed public policy decisions made by members of Congress and others.

A Call to Action

Although bark beetles are native to forests of the western U.S., severe drought in combination with unhealthy forest conditions over the past decade have resulted in extraordinary levels of bark beetle-caused tree mortality across the West. We are positioned to address the unhealthy forest conditions contributing to bark beetle outbreaks through active management. While we cannot stop large outbreaks, with additional resources we can minimize the impacts of ongoing and future outbreaks on the 2.4 million acres of highest priority in the West. Without increased active forest management we can expect more bark beetle outbreaks, severe wildfire, and negative impacts on public benefits from forests.

Now is the window of opportunity for action.



States and Islands within the Western Forestry Leadership Coalition



Executive Summary

The Problem: Unhealthy Forests and Bark Beetle Outbreaks

Many of today's western forests are denser, have different species composition and stand structure, and lack age diversity compared with forests prior to European settlement. In the wetter, high elevation forests of the West, stand density is within the historic range, but the majority of stands have reached an age where bark beetle susceptibility is peaking. The current condition of western forests is a result of many influences, not the least of which are the past actions of humans on the landscape. The effects of fire exclusion, grazing, unsustainable logging, drought, and the lack of forest management are recognized as contributing factors leading to unhealthy western forests. Current and changing climatic conditions are combining with these human impacts on forest conditions to trigger widespread bark beetle-caused tree mortality. From 2002 to 2003, the number of forested acres in the West detected with bark beetle-caused tree mortality saw the largest increase ever recorded, more than doubling from 4 million to 10 million acres.

The Consequences: Public Benefits at Risk

Native bark beetles are important components of western forest ecosystems and some level of bark beetle-caused tree mortality is desired for proper ecosystem function. However high levels of tree mortality negatively impact communities and place important public values at risk. Healthy forests provide clean air and water, wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, and serve as renewable sources of a diversity of forest products. The nation depends upon these public benefits derived from healthy forests for their economic, social, and ecological well-being. These public benefits are being negatively impacted by bark beetle outbreaks, and are at risk of being negatively impacted for many generations to come.

The Solution: Strategic and Active Forest Management

This assessment consolidates the most up-to-date information on bark beetle outbreaks in the western U.S. and outlines a framework for prioritized action. This framework includes: a map of high priority acres to be considered for active forest management, a toolbox of scientifically-sound active management techniques to mitigate negative impacts from bark beetles, and the identification of cooperative groups that can leverage resources and manage bark beetle outbreaks across all boundaries and at multiples scales. This framework will facilitate efficient and effective efforts to mitigate bark beetle outbreaks and their associated negative impacts on the highest priority acres in the West. Even with additional resources and a highly concerted effort, there will be no quick fix. The problem requires a commitment to long-term forest stewardship to shift the balance back toward healthy, vigorous forests that are resilient to drought and bark beetle attacks. This stewardship strategy can encourage collaboration and help ensure that forests continue to provide the numerous public benefits that Americans value for generations to come.



The Western Bark Beetle Assessment Is

Strategic, Not Tactical

The Western Bark Beetle Assessment includes both a comprehensive assessment of the extent and consequences of bark beetle outbreaks as well as a strategic framework for prioritized action. This includes an accurate estimate of west-wide resource needs to actively manage the highest priority forested acres affected by bark beetle outbreaks. Conducted at a west-wide geographic scale, it identifies high priority acres to estimate resource needs but is not intended to set specific priorities for local planning, decision making, and implementation. Rather, we encourage new and rely upon existing collaborative efforts at the local level to identify fine-scale tactical areas for active management, coordinate partners working cooperatively across boundaries, and leverage limited resources.

Based on the Best Available Science

A comprehensive, peer-reviewed synthesis of scientific studies investigating active forest management to mitigate bark beetle outbreaks has been completed by an expert team of agency and university researchers. This research synthesizes almost 500 publications on the subject and its conclusions generally support the hypothesis that active forest management techniques can reduce the impacts of bark beetle activity and increase resiliency to future attacks. We rely on this scientific analysis and recent work by the USDA Forest Service Research and Development's Western Bark Beetle Research Group for broad guidance on management actions and to identify knowledge gaps for further research.

A Common Framework for Cross-Boundary Collaboration and Partnerships

This assessment dovetails with the goals and efforts of the National Fire Plan, 10 Year Implementation Plan, Healthy Forests Initiative, and Healthy Forest Restoration Act. Using collaborative frameworks, this assessment lays out a plan for actively managing the unhealthy forest conditions that contribute to both bark beetle outbreaks and severe wildfires on the highest priority acres in the West. Bark beetles and wildfire do not recognize administrative or political boundaries. Therefore partnerships within and among agencies and communities have been recognized as critical to effectively managing forests. As such, cooperative groups with shared goals have coalesced in many areas. They have identified ways to leverage resources, work across boundaries, and actively manage the western forests upon which they depend for their economic, social, and ecological well-being.

The USDA Forest Service State and Private Forestry, in concert with states, initiated a new approach to funding some activities in 2008. This new approach facilitates the kind of cross-boundary collaboration that is needed to deal with bark beetle outbreaks. States submitted integrated projects for competitive funding consideration. A number of these projects had a bark beetle treatment component—prevention, suppression, restoration, or some combination of the three management strategies. For example, the Colorado Bark Beetle Cooperative is designed to actively address the most severe mountain pine beetle epidemic on record. The Butte Watershed Restoration Project in Montana will treat high priority acres for mountain pine beetle and fuels in a comprehensive cross-boundary, multi-landowner, and multiple agency response to improve forest conditions.

The Problem: Unhealthy Forests and Bark Beetle Outbreaks

Why are many western forests unhealthy?

Many factors have influenced the western forests we see today, not the least of which have been a number of human influences. Over the past century fire exclusion, grazing, logging, and other activities have all influenced structural changes in western forests. In recent decades, a lack of active forest management has had an equally important effect on the current state of western forests. Active forest management consists of manipulating forests through various means including mechanical thinning, prescribed burning, planting, and other techniques at varying scales. The net results of these influences are the forests we see today. These forests exhibit high tree densities and hazardous fuel buildup—key factors contributing to the unhealthy state of many western forests. In addition, recent climatic conditions are combining with and intensifying these unhealthy forest conditions in many areas of the West. This “perfect storm” has resulted in a significant proportion of western forests that are highly susceptible to bark beetle outbreaks and severe wildfires.

What factors are causing bark beetle outbreaks?

Forest structure—the age, size, species, and distribution of trees across the landscape—can limit or exacerbate the effects of weather and climate on forests. Currently, the structure of many western forests includes more trees than were present earlier in the century (Figures 1 and 2). Overly-dense forest structure increases stress on individual trees as competition for limited nutrients and water increases. In addition, an extreme alteration of species composition has occurred in some areas. Many drought tolerant species such as pine have been replaced by other species that are more stressed by drought. Increased stress weakens trees, making them highly susceptible to bark beetle outbreaks. On a larger spatial scale, many historic forests of the West were made up of different age and size patches, similar to a jigsaw puzzle. This pattern tended to interrupt beetle migration. Much of the western forested landscape now lacks the structural, species, and spatial diversity necessary to resist and slow bark beetle attack. Fortunately, we have tools available to manage forests to increase their diversity, thus making them more resistant and resilient.



Figure 1. Photograph taken in August 1925 of western U.S. pine dominated forest stand exhibiting open, low density forest structure. Photo by A.E. Weislander.



Figure 2. Photograph taken in July 1993 of the same western U.S. pine dominated forest stand, exhibiting a significantly higher number of trees. Photo by A. H. Taylor.

What is the current status of bark beetle outbreaks?

In recent years, bark beetle outbreaks have reached epidemic proportions. Forest Health Protection aerial-detection surveys show that from 2002 to 2003, the number of acres of western forests with bark beetle-caused tree mortality saw the largest jump in recorded history, more than doubling from 4 million to 10 million acres (Figure 3).

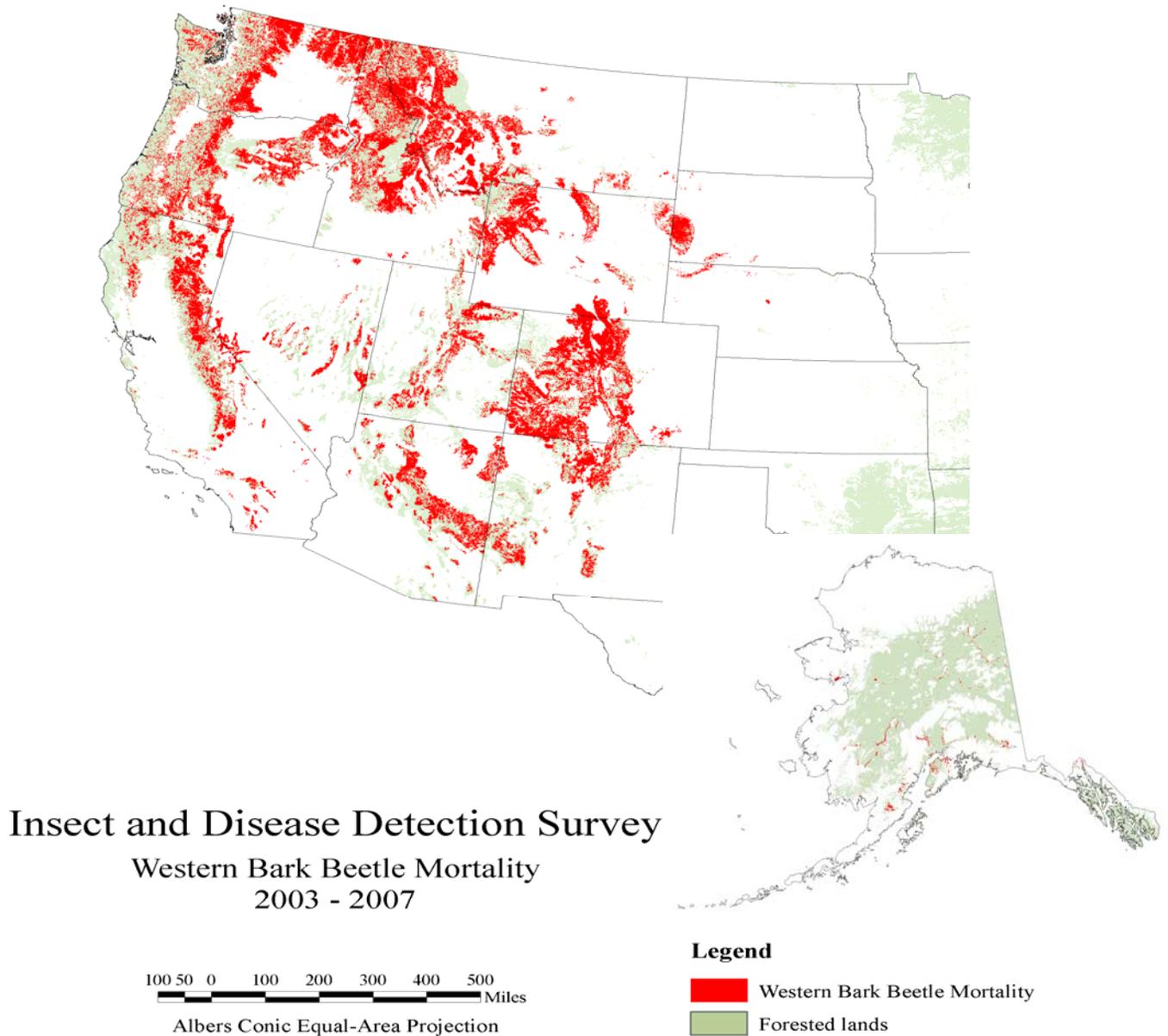


Figure 3. Western bark beetle mortality obtained from State and Private Forestry aerial-detection surveys (2003-2007). Alaska is not to-scale nor in the correct position.

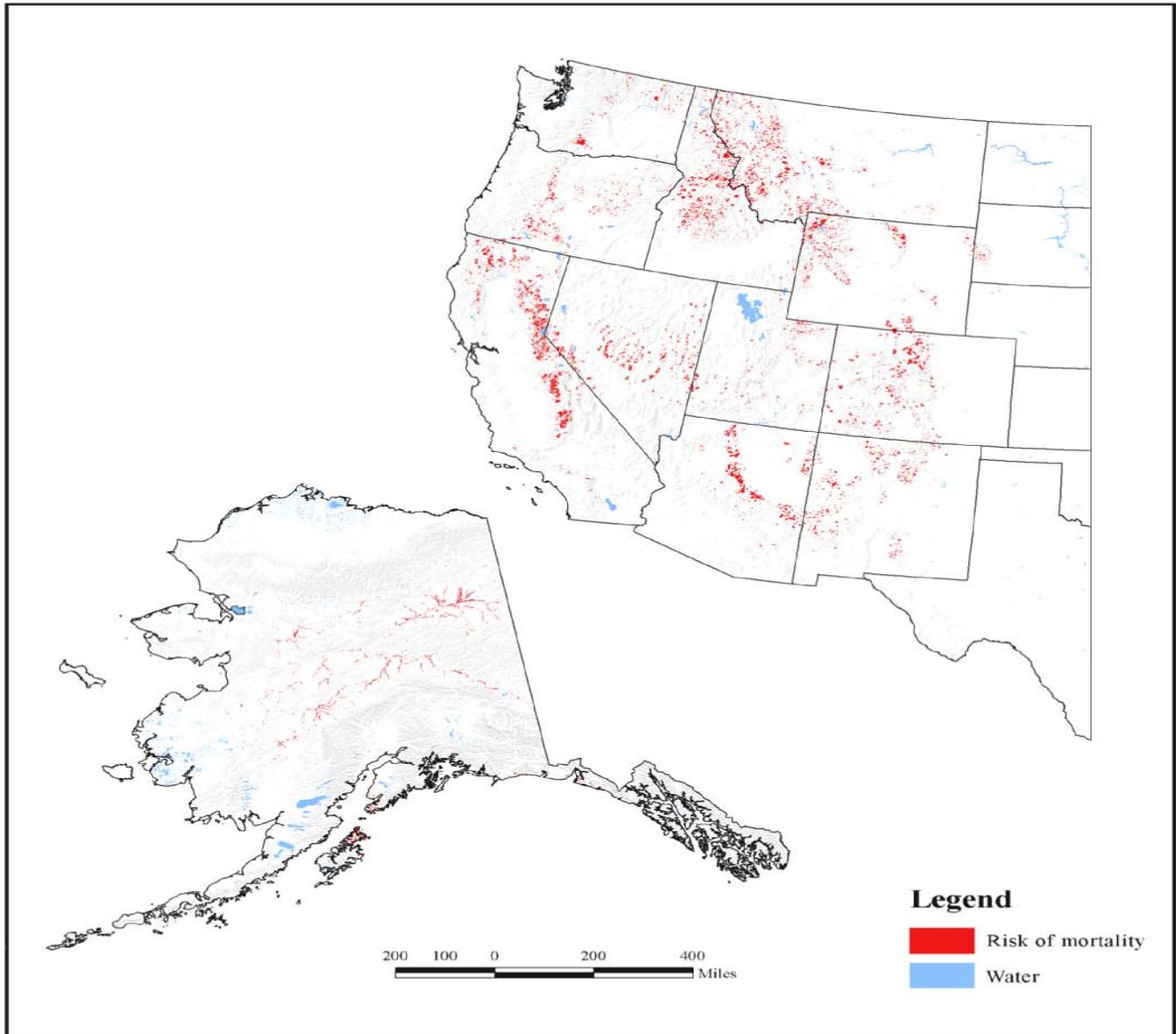
What is the future risk of additional bark beetle outbreaks?

The USDA Forest Service estimated in 2002 that over the next 15 years, approximately 22 million additional acres of western forests, on both federal and non-federal lands, could experience significant tree mortality from bark beetles (Figure 4). These acres are at risk because much of the western forested landscape now lacks the structural, species, and spatial diversity necessary to resist and slow bark beetle attack.

NATIONAL INSECT and DISEASE RISK MAP

Bark Beetle Risk*

Acres at risk: Approximately 22 million



* The expectation that 25% or more of the standing live volume of trees greater than 1" in diameter will die over the next 15 years.

Printing Date: November 29, 2006

Figure 4. Forested acres in the western U.S. at significant risk of bark beetle-caused tree mortality (in red).

What is the relationship between bark beetle outbreaks and wildland fire?

Bark beetle-caused tree mortality can alter wildfire severity and intensity. How fire behavior is modified in a stand of trees killed by bark beetles is dependent on many factors and changes over time. One significant factor is surface fuel. As bark beetle-killed trees fall, heavy surface fuel loads are created on the ground (Figure 5). These fuels can act as ladders and carry a ground fire into tree crowns. Heavy surface fuel loads also increase heat intensity and duration of the fire on the forest floor which can severely impact soil, water, and the forest's ability to produce other services of benefit to society. Changes in hazardous fuel loads resulting from bark beetle-caused tree mortality do not change the "fire risk" (probability of a fire occurring) but do change the fire hazard (potential for high severity fire).

While bark beetle-caused tree mortality may lead to increased wildfire hazard, the susceptibility of trees to bark beetle attack can also be increased by wildfire effects. It is well established in the scientific literature that fire-weakened trees can be more susceptible to successful attack by bark beetles, thus increases in bark beetle populations associated with wildfire could occur and move into unburned areas. This varies by tree species, geographical location, and bark beetle species. For example, the Douglas-fir beetle has the ability to increase in population size following fire and then move into adjacent live host material outside the burned area.

As dead trees decay and fall to the ground, they often pose an additional risk to public and private property. Mature, beetle killed trees can be large and very heavy, increasing the likelihood that they will create significant damage if they land in an area where people, structures, communication sites, or other values are present. Often times the hazard of falling dead trees is unobservable to the untrained eye.



Figure 5. As these bark-beetle killed trees decay they fall to the ground and add to the total fuel load that contributes to wildland fire hazard.

The Consequences: Public Benefits at Risk

What values are at risk?

Values at risk from bark beetle outbreaks are numerous. Healthy forests are aesthetically pleasing for sightseeing and recreation, they provide habitat for fish and wildlife, and a renewable source of forest products. Healthy forests also provide “ecosystem services” such as clean air and water, and serve as a sink for carbon dioxide, a potent greenhouse gas. Healthy forests enhance private property values (Figure 6), provide places for quiet relaxation and contemplation, and provide habitat for many species of plants and animals. Forests impacted by severe bark beetle outbreaks may not effectively provide these essential services. Decaying trees release carbon dioxide and changed fuel loads could alter fire behavior and threaten air and water quality.

What are ecosystem services?

Ecosystem services are commonly understood as natural processes that benefit people, whether directly or indirectly. Well known and tangible ecosystem services from the forest include timber, non-timber forest products, and wildlife enjoyed for viewing or hunting. Forests also regulate water quantity and quality, sequester and store carbon through growth and in biomass, create and retain soil, and provide recreation opportunities. Because many of these services are not directly used, are taken for granted, or considered to be “free”, it is difficult to assign dollar values. However, in the interest of communicating the importance of conservation and land management, there are many studies (old and new) attempting to do just that. For example:

- The global ecosystem provides an estimated \$16-54 trillion in benefits per year.
- The water flowing from the 193 million acre National Forest System has an estimated value of US\$3.7-7.2 billion per year.
- In 2001, 82 million people spent more than \$140 billion on nature-based tourism. That includes watching and photographing wildlife, hunting, and fishing.
- In 2007, 65 MtCO₂e (million tons of carbon dioxide equivalent) were traded in voluntary carbon markets for an estimated value of over \$330 million. Transactions in the global market (regulated and voluntary) topped 2,983 MtCO₂e and \$64 billion.



Figure 6. Bark beetle-killed trees can negatively impact values in forested residential areas. They also present a significant hazard as they decay and fall to the ground.



The Solution: Strategic and Active Forest Management

It has taken decades to arrive at the current state of unhealthy forest conditions and bark beetle-caused tree mortality across the West. It will take a long-term commitment to active management of the forests of the West to increase their vigor and resistance to/resiliency after bark beetle outbreaks. If resources are made available that enable active forest management efforts to match the extent and severity of the problem, major progress can be made towards mitigating the negative ecological, social, and economic effects of bark beetle outbreaks. The first step in a long-term stewardship approach using active management is to prioritize those acres posing the greatest risk to public values.

What is the scientific basis for active forest management?

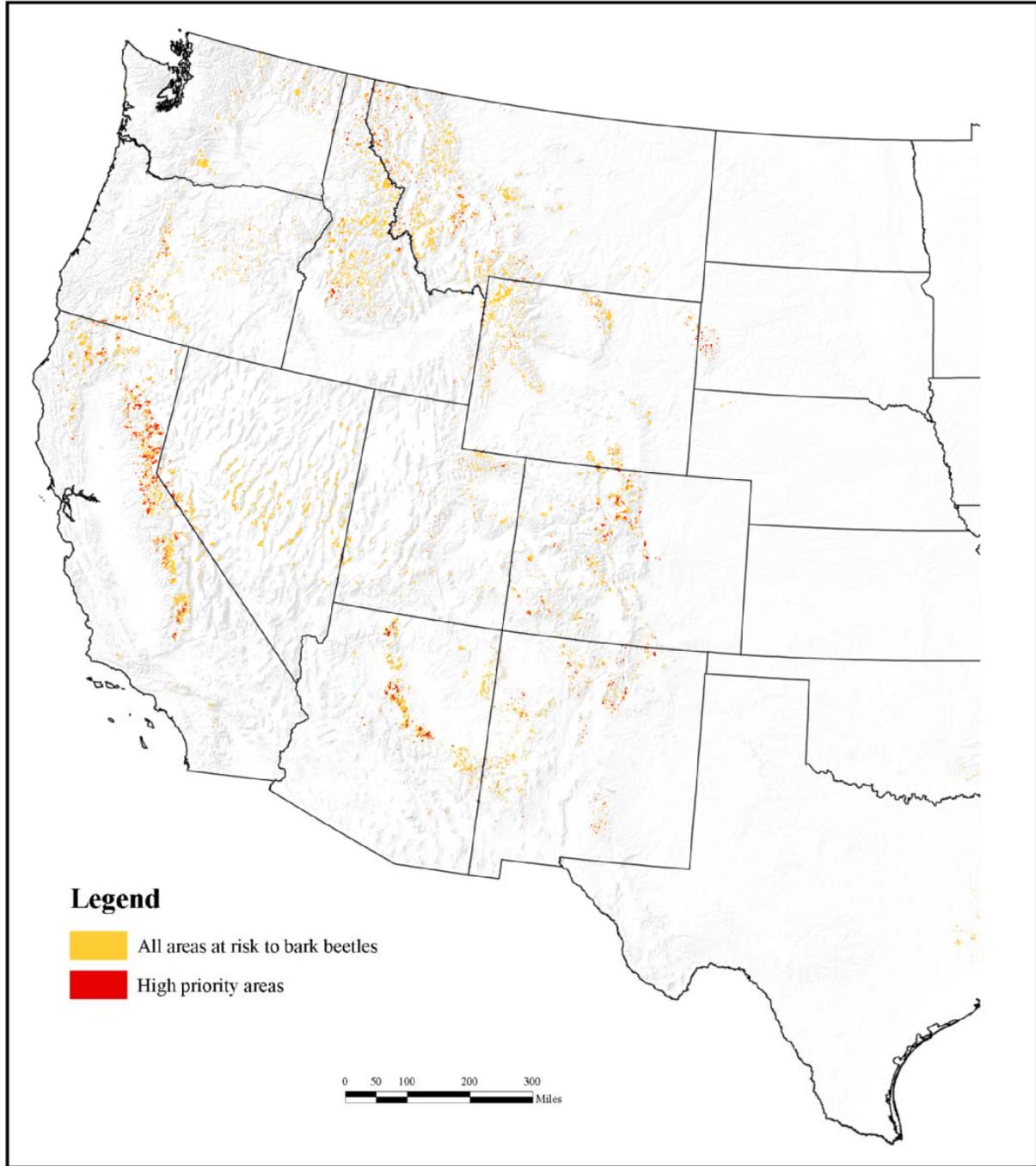
A panel of experts that includes USDA Forest Service Research scientists, university researchers, and USDA Forest Service Forest Health Protection specialists has recently concluded a review of approximately 500 scientific studies that analyze the effects of vegetation management to control and mitigate the effects of bark beetle outbreaks. During the course of their investigation they were able to gather extensive amounts of literature on the effects of forest thinning and other vegetation management practices on forest susceptibility to insect infestation. Some of their general conclusions are as follows:

- Native tree-killing bark beetles are a natural component of forest ecosystems. Eradication is neither possible nor desirable and periodic bark beetle outbreaks will occur as long as susceptible forests and favorable climatic conditions exist.
- A variety of vegetation management practices can help reduce the impact of bark beetles where desired. These include thinning forest stands, prescribed burning, and selective cutting of insect infested trees, and others.
- Management to reduce stand or landscape-level susceptibility to bark beetles must address factors related to tree density.
- The scientific literature generally supports the effectiveness of thinning in preventing and/or reducing tree mortality caused by bark beetles in the western U.S.

How do we prioritize acres to actively manage?

Over 22 million acres are at risk of significant bark beetle caused tree mortality across the West (Figure 6). The first step in a long-term stewardship approach using active management is to prioritize the acres that can be realistically managed in the short-term and which present the greatest risk to public values such as private property, recreation areas, communication infrastructure, and others associated with the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI). As such, we have created a map (Figure 7) that overlays risk of bark beetle caused tree mortality based on the National Insects and Disease Risk Map layer and the occurrence of WUI based on the Wildland Fire Risk to Flammable Structures layer. Additionally, we have purposefully left out areas with less than 35 percent or greater than 65 percent risk of future bark beetle-cause tree mortality from the National Insects and Disease Risk Map layer. This was done because we believe that actively managing areas that fall within the 35-65% mortality range has the greatest likelihood of success. 2.4 million acres out of the 22 million acres west-wide meet this priority rating system. Although the data are coarse scale, they are robust enough to represent an accurate estimate of the highest priority acres across the West for consideration at the local level. Local managers, working within cooperative groups, should consider other ecological, social, and economic factors as they plan and prioritize projects.

Western Bark Beetle Risk*



* The expectation that 25% or more of the standing live volume of trees greater than 1" in diameter will die over the next 15 years, including background mortality.

Printing Date: January 17, 2007

Figure 7. Forested acres in the western U.S. where bark beetle risk is coincident with where fire prone properties indicate a wildland urban interface. This map represents a west-wide, coarse-scale analysis of priority acres on which to actively manage forests susceptible to bark beetles. (Comparable data are not available for Alaska.)

How do we account for ecological, social, and economic factors?

Because forests are ecological systems that interact with social and economic systems, all three of must be considered when prioritizing acres for treatment. This framework is used to illustrate the multitude of factors that local cooperators may use to prioritize acres to be actively managed at the local scale. The table below (Table 1) is intended to provide examples of factors that may be taken into consideration at the local scale:

Ecological	Social	Economic
Forest Type (Lodgepole Pine, Douglas-Fir, Ponderosa Pine, etc.)	Suitable Uses for Land (Wilderness, High-Use Recreation, etc.)	Distance to Wood and/or Biomass Processing Facilities
Anticipated Mortality Level (10%, 50%, 90%, etc.)	Visual and Aesthetic Values	Impact on Recreation-Based Economies
Threatened and Endangered Species Habitat	Public Safety	Wildland Urban Interface
Wildfire Risk	Wildland Urban Interface	Likelihood of Recovering Economic Value of Wood Products

Table 1. Factors influencing prioritization of areas on which to actively manage bark beetle outbreaks locally.

Collaboration and Partnerships Across Boundaries

Because bark beetles do not recognize administrative boundaries, cooperative groups and partnerships among agencies and communities are critical to active management of beetle outbreaks and hazardous fuels. The local identification of high priority acres is being accomplished through cooperative partnerships at both regional and local community levels. Specifically, cooperative task forces have identified specific acres for treatment on maps and have put into place the agreements necessary to actively manage these acres. This local prioritization also takes place during the development of Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs) as directed by the Healthy Forests Restoration Act. CWPPs specifically identify community values at risk, and provide a general plan of attack for decreasing wildfire risk. Because these same values are at risk to both bark beetle outbreaks and wildfire, many cooperative partner groups have utilized the same type of risk assessment for prioritizing treatment areas to actively manage forests to mitigate impacts from bark beetles and wildfire. Because of the close relationship between bark beetle-caused tree mortality and wildfire hazard, this dovetailed approach makes logical sense.

These groups are already in place in many areas across the West. They are prepared to leverage resources to implement scientifically-sound strategies that will protect and restore western forests upon which Americans depend for their quality of life. Examples include: the Kenai Peninsula’s All Lands/All Hands Program in Alaska; the Mountain Area Safety Task Force (MAST) in Southern California; and the Colorado Bark Beetle Cooperative in Northern Colorado. Many other collaborative groups exist across the West. They have formed in response to the severe bark beetle outbreaks in their areas and are poised to manage forests across jurisdictional boundaries. Because so many different authorities, agencies, and programs can be utilized, close coordination and sharing of resources and information are critical to successful implementation of projects.

Management Strategies: Prevention, Suppression, Restoration, Research and Outreach

Actively managing the forests of the West to reduce susceptibility to bark beetle outbreaks can provide long-term benefits ecologically, socially, and economically. This report focuses on four commonly accepted strategies: prevention, suppression, restoration, and research and outreach. Although all components are necessary to effectively manage the current proliferation of bark beetles, prevention, along with education, may be the most effective long-term strategy. Preventive thinning can effectively increase forest resistance to both bark beetle outbreaks and catastrophic wildfire. It is likely more cost-effective and feasible to prevent large-scale bark beetle outbreaks than to attempt to suppress an active outbreak or restore a forest that has experienced significant mortality from beetle outbreak, wildfire, or both.

Prevention

Prevention is a proactive approach designed to reduce forest susceptibility to bark beetle outbreaks by changing forest conditions. Prevention presents the greatest opportunity for long-term improvement and maintenance of forest health in the West and is mainly accomplished by thinning forest stands. Through variable thinning across landscapes and/or among size/age classes and species of trees, prevention treatments reduce the risk of outbreaks on the landscape by creating a mosaic and mitigating the homogenous, overcrowded conditions forests that have proved conducive to bark beetle expansion. These treatments will ultimately result in lower fuel accumulation and ladder fuels, will lower risk of stand-replacing wildfires, and will help facilitate the re-introduction of safer, prescribed fires (Figures 8 and 9). Such forests are less susceptible to bark beetle outbreaks and destructive fires, thereby reducing suppression costs and restoration needs in the long run.



Figure 8. Forest before treatment



Figure 9. Forest after treatment

Prevention thinning is not a “cookie cutter” or one-size-fits-all approach. Not all forests are equally susceptible to bark beetle outbreaks. Less susceptible forest types would not necessarily be a priority for treatment under this assessment; however other social or economic factors may contribute to a decision to treat them. These factors may include proximity to the WUI. By actively managing susceptible stands, the risk of significant bark beetle caused tree mortality can be lowered. Increasing both the amount and scale of prevention treatments will result in a decrease in the number of acres at high risk of mortality as identified by the National Insects and Diseases Risk Map (Figure 4).

To obtain the greatest benefits over large areas, prevention treatments must be coordinated across all ownerships and boundaries. Technical and financial assistance must be provided to non-industrial, private forest landowners to assist with treatment costs. This initiative complements and builds upon ongoing USDA Forest Service State and Private Forestry programs that emphasize partnerships and cost-sharing of investments on multi-ownership, watershed-level improvement projects. Additionally, the real and potential effects of climate change are pushing the USDA Forest Service to investigate more proactively the occurrence of infestations outside normal ranges, largely via the Evaluation Monitoring Component of the Forest Health Monitoring. This and other new information can help guide where, when, and how to accomplish prevention treatments. It also needs to drive development of science-based decision support systems for strategic timing and placement of treatments from stand to landscape to regional scales. Long-term monitoring of treatment effectiveness is critical to improve practices in the future.

Suppression

Unlike long-term prevention treatments that reduce future mortality by altering stand conditions, short-term suppression strategies call for expedited treatments sometimes necessary to limit the negative impacts of ongoing outbreaks in high-value areas such as threatened and endangered species habitat, recreation sites, the WUI, and municipal watersheds. Depending on the type of bark beetle, successful short-term suppression actions can include removal of infested and potential host material, such as wind-thrown trees; the use of pheromone-baited funnel traps and trap trees to capture beetles; and the use of pesticides (Figure 10) and anti-aggregation compounds to protect high-value trees during an outbreak. These short-term suppression strategies are effective and provide resource managers with valuable time to design and implement prevention treatments that will reduce bark beetle susceptibility risk and restore forest resiliency. Over time, a large-scale prevention program will decrease the need for suppression treatments. This assessment recognizes the increasing need for new and improved, cost-effective suppression treatments in light of the increase in bark beetle infestations on all lands, and hence the need for research, development and technology transfer on suppression techniques.



Figure 10. High-value tree being treated with chemicals to prevent bark beetle attack.



Restoration

Bark beetle outbreaks have severely impacted high-value areas, such as developed sites, threatened and endangered species habitat, private lands and Federal ownership adjacent to them, and visual corridors. Restoration activities are essential to reduce the negative impacts associated with the change from live forests to dead ones and to facilitate recovery. While some areas of dead trees are normal and necessary, the current massive proliferation of bark beetles is producing increasingly vast areas of dead forests, many of which are in need of active restoration.

Restoration efforts have the overarching goal of accelerating and directing the regeneration of forest ecosystems in beetle-killed areas in a manner that is more predictable, and more consistent with social expectations than those associated with natural recovery alone. Restoration treatments include reducing potential or actual ground fuel loading, ladder fuels, and hazard trees, planting a proper species mix, and restoring and protecting early successional habitat (accomplished through natural regeneration, artificial seeding, and/or planting). Specific restoration treatments will be implemented on a priority basis dependent upon needs determined at the local level.

Research and Outreach

Much of what we know about bark beetle outbreaks has been learned through research. Although a great deal of knowledge and multiple tools are available to address the bark beetle problem, we will continually strive to know more and develop better tools to be successful over the long term. The USDA Forest Service has recently organized a research group to address research needs specifically regarding bark beetle outbreaks across the West. Through the formation of the Western Bark Beetle Research Group (WBBRG), the directors of the three western Forest Service Research Stations have committed to improving the effectiveness of their programs through enhanced communication and coordination, and have identified bark beetle research and development as a priority area for inter-station collaboration. To strengthen working relationships and maximize effectiveness in addressing bark beetle outbreaks, the three western Research Stations recently met with regional partners in Forest Health Protection, State & Private Forestry. The mission of the WBBRG is to enhance responsiveness, delivery, and impact of bark beetle research in the western U.S.

Additionally, outreach and technology transfer must occur between research and development and managers. For research outputs and monitoring activities to be useful, they must prove relevant, practical and ultimately be adopted by the management community. Hence, open communication between the science and management communities will be an essential component of this framework to promote mutual understanding on bark beetle management needs, as will effective transfer of science-derived information, tools, and technologies from researchers to land managers. Forest Health Protection's entomologists and pathologists working with the WBBRG provide a means for this communication and technology transfer to occur.

Outreach to the public, private landowners, and others as to the importance of active management and stewardship to maintain western forest health over the long-term is essential to success. Outreach is a critical component of any forest health strategy. Informing people of the impacts of tree mortality, its underlying causes, and ways to limit the extent of tree mortality will generate a greater understanding and acceptance of the need for action. The decision not to act is still a management decision, and identifying the effects of not taking action is a key piece of the outreach message.

Measuring Progress: What Does Success Look Like?

High Priority Acres Treated

Successful prevention, suppression, and restoration treatments can be measured many ways. The number of acres treated will provide a quantitative measure of effort and of success. From 2005-2008, 163,497 acres of federal forest lands were treated and 60,373 acres of state and private land (Figure 11). Of these acres treated, 55 percent employed suppression strategies, 40 percent prevention, and 5 percent restoration strategies (Figure 12). A reduction in large scale bark beetle outbreaks and catastrophic stand-replacing fires in areas that have been thinned will provide a more long-term, outcome-oriented measure of forest health improvement.

Research and Development Tools Created

Critical to the continuing development of this framework is the evaluation of existing science-based tools that address the ongoing proliferation of bark beetle infestations. Without increasing our knowledge of what management techniques and tools are working, we risk using critical and limited resources in ways that may not be providing the greatest return on our investment. Scientific monitoring and evaluation of existing management techniques is one avenue to accomplishing this goal. Development of new, more cost-effective tools, practices, strategies and decision support systems is also necessary to address remaining questions and improve the future effectiveness of prevention, suppression, and restoration programs. Much of this work is currently being addressed by the Western Bark Beetle Research Group.

Increased Public Understanding and Participation in Active Management

Increasing public understanding of the risks posed to the numerous public benefits that forests of the West provide is critical to the long-term stewardship proposed under this assessment. Measuring success on this front is difficult at best, however. One specific measure of public understanding and acceptance of actively managing forests to prevent bark beetle outbreaks is the level of participation and sense of responsibility within local communities in the management of their forests. The USDA Forest Service has been taking action to reduce the impact from bark beetles, to restore lands affected by bark beetles, and to prevent additional bark beetle losses on federal lands. States are using federal grant funding matched with state and local funds to address issues on state and private lands. During the past five years, over \$59 million of federal funds, matched with over \$16 million of state and local funds, have been directed toward bark beetle prevention and suppression, as well as restoration of bark beetle impacted lands. This has resulted in the treatment of nearly one-half million acres across the West.

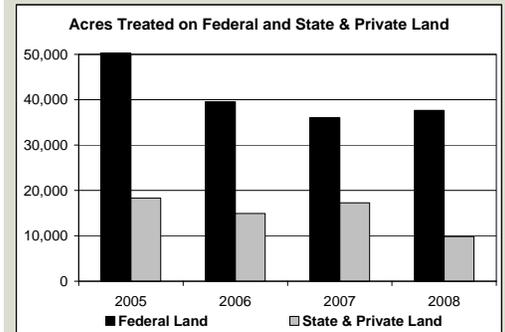


Figure 11. Acres of federal and state/private forestland receiving prevention, suppression, or restoration treatments between 2005 and 2008.

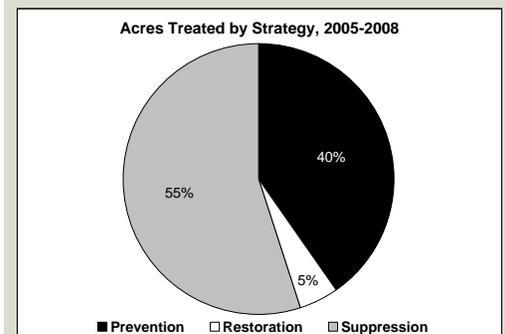
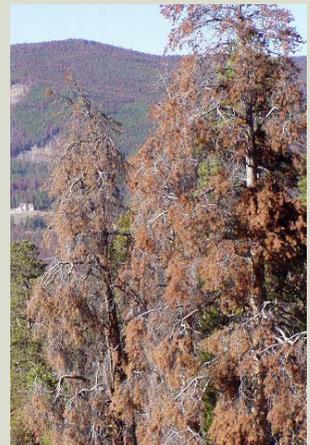


Figure 12. Percentage of total acres treated (2005-2008) receiving prevention, suppression, or restoration treatments between.

Conclusion: A Comprehensive Assessment and Framework to Manage and Protect Western Forests and Public Values

The Western Bark Beetle Assessment lays out a strategic approach to reduce the undesirable bark beetle-caused tree mortality in the forests of the West and increase forest resiliency to bark beetle outbreaks and catastrophic wildland fires. The assessment centralizes information on the current proliferation of bark beetles throughout the West, future risk, management strategies, and tools to accomplish the long-term goal of protecting and restoring western forests to a state of improved health and sustainability. This assessment provides the landscape scale overview that local teams can draw upon for coordinated action to address the problem.

If financial and human resources to implement this framework are made available, we can begin to strategically mitigate the impacts of bark beetle outbreaks now on the highest priority acres in the West—the first step in a long-term commitment to stewardship. Without this commitment, we all risk further compromise and potential loss of public benefits that forests provide for generations to come.





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