

## **SUMMARY OF AERIAL FOREST HEALTH SURVEY OBSERVATIONS**

**13-25 August 2012**

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### **AREAS FLOWN**

During the period 13-25 August, I flew portions of northern Colorado including the Front Range, the I-70 Corridor the Colorado State Forest (North Park) and an area south of Mt. Evans and west of US 285.

### **HIGHLIGHTS OF OBSERVATIONS**

**MOUNTAIN PINE BEETLE** - Mountain pine beetle is currently most active at low to mid-elevations including ponderosa pine and ponderosa pine/lodgepole pine transition zone forests in Larimer County. Damage continues to occur in ponderosa pine forests in the Beaver Creek Basin and on Table Mountain, east of US 287. Damage also continues in ponderosa pine forests east of Red Feather Lakes and in lodgepole pine forests on the slopes of North, Middle and Bald Mountains west of Red Feather Lakes. Damage continued in both ponderosa and lodgepole pine forests at moderate to severe levels throughout the South Fork Cache La Poudre Basin. Damage also continued in the Buckhorn Creek and Lower Big Thompson River Basin in both lodgepole and ponderosa pines. Stands within the High Park fire area that survived the fire harbor moderate levels of mountain pine beetle attack.

Infestations declined significantly in most high elevation lodgepole pine forests from the Wyoming border south to the I-70 Corridor. No new infestations were detected in the Colorado State Forest and new attacks were largely confined to small diameter lodgepole pine stands on the eastern slope of the Rawah Range, the upper Cache La Poudre and upper Big Thompson River Basins. It is doubtful that brood produced in trees of small diameter classes will be sufficient to sustain the outbreak in these areas.

Much of the decline in mountain pine beetle infestations in lodgepole pine forests north of Estes Park can be attributed to decimation of the suitable host type. However lodgepole pine forests south of Estes Park including the Bear Lake area of Rocky Mountain National Park and portions of Boulder, Gilpin and Clear Creek Counties still appear to have a substantial component of lodgepole pine in size classes suitable to sustain an outbreak. Cause of the decline in beetle activity in these areas is not known.

SPRUCE BEETLE - Spruce beetle infestations in northern Colorado, including the Rawah Range, Cameron Pass, the upper Cache La Poudre Basin, the South Fork Cache La Poudre Basin and the Big Thompson River Basin continued in 2012 but at lower levels due to depletion of the mature Engelmann spruce component of these forests. Much of the Engelmann spruce type in this area now has a gray cast due to the large numbers of dead trees.

SUBALPINE FIR DECLINE – Areas of fading subalpine fir continued to occur in the upper elevations of the Rawah Range and other high elevation forests in the area surveyed.

BLOWDOWN – Areas of fresh blowdown were detected in several drainages south of the I-70 corridor. These included the upper Cabin Creek Basin near Naylor Lake north of Guanella Pass, the lower Leavenworth Creek Basin and South Chicago Creek. Eleven areas, with a total of just under 300 acres were mapped (Clear Creek County). A localized area of fresh windthrow was detected in the upper Willow Creek Basin, a tributary of the upper Cache La Poudre River (Larimer County).

ASPEN DISCOLORATION – An area of aspen with foliage of a distinct gray cast was mapped on the southern slopes of Arizona and Montana Mountains in the Plum Creek Basin (Gilpin County). Limited access prevented ground checks in the area but many aspen stands in the vicinity had brown leaf margins indicative of leaf scorch due to drought.

LEAF MINING OF NARROW LEAF COTTONWOOD - Areas of what appeared to be early fall coloration was noted in several stands of narrow leaf cottonwood in the lower Big Thompson River Canyon. Ground checks indicated that the foliage of the affected trees suffered moderate to heavy damage by a leaf miner. The damage has been tentatively identified by Whitney Cranshaw, Extension Entomologist, CSU, as caused by the poplar blackmine beetle, *Zeugophora scutellatus* Suffrain (Coleoptera: Chrysomelidae). Poplar blackmine beetle is an introduced species known to occur over much of the eastern US and several western states including Colorado, New Mexico and Wyoming. This insect has damaged plains cottonwood but has not previously been reported from narrow-leaf cottonwood.