

Neighborhood Watch

June 21, 2016

32 people attended

Guest speaker: Aaron Smith District Manager for Sierra Pacific Industries

They have put off the fire break that is supposed to go around BTV due to the amount of dead tree removal they have to do now. Their mills have been running at full capacity because they are harvesting the dead trees from the Butte fire as well as the dead trees from the drought. SPI probably won't start the fire break for another year at least.

The work you can hear going on behind the BTV Rec Center is SPI removing dead trees near their fire road as well as Board's Crossing Road. This work will act as a small fire break in that area.

The conversation moved on to

Bark beetles: There are 2 types of bark beetles at our elevation which are hitting the ponderosa pine and white fir.

How can you tell if your trees are infected? Look for reddish-brown pitch tubes. These ½-¾ inch blobs of sap on the outside of a tree trunk are a sign that bark beetles successfully attacked the tree. Bark beetles attack stressed trees by boring holes into the bark. A normal, healthy tree would be able to fend off attack by exuding pitch into the holes pushing the beetle out. But drought-stressed trees have a difficult time producing enough pitch to fight off insects. Compounding the problem, beetles release pheromones that attract other beetles. This mass influx of beetles can quickly overwhelm a tree. Bark beetles are also attracted to freshly cut wood. In some areas, the trees are so dry, the only evidence that a tree is under attack is a sawdust-like substance, called frass.

What do I do with my dead trees now that I've cut them down? You can either leave the dead trees on your property or you can have them removed. If you are leaving the trees on your property they need to be properly handled. If you plan on using the wood for firewood, cut to the appropriate size and store. Wood from bark beetle-infested trees can be covered with plastic, following a specific technique to kill the beetles, and left covered for several months.* If wood is not going to be used, lop—or chip and scatter—the wood. The smaller the pieces the better. Chipping will kill bark beetles and the smaller pieces are less of a fire hazard.

How do I prevent bark beetles in the future? Aaron suggested the best way to prevent bark beetles is by thinning your trees so that they don't have to compete for the limited water and nutrient resources. It's also a good idea to cut back the undergrowth for the same reason.

There are some chemical/pheromone treatments that may be effective, but Aaron didn't make any recommendations. Some of the treatments can be rather expensive too.

Another suggestion is to water your trees, which is possible now that water restrictions have been lifted. The extra water will help keep the trees from getting stressed.

The bottom line is this: we are in extreme conditions that have never been experienced before and no one knows for sure what course of action is best. Aaron suspects we are not at the end of this and he expects a minimum of 2 more years of dying trees.

***I found the firewood tarping method in a Cal Fire Bulletin at the following web site:**

http://www.fire.ca.gov/downloads/tree_notes/treenote3.pdf