

Letter to Alta Property Owners – October 28, 2009
Re: Spruce Bark Beetle Concerns

A spruce bark beetle outbreak was first detected near Cedar City, Utah, and has proceeded northward yearly until it was detected in Heber Valley and Big Cottonwood Canyon. As of summer 2009, levels of spruce bark beetle in Big Cottonwood Canyon were determined to have exceeded natural levels. To a lesser extent, the beetle has been identified on public lands in the Town of Alta. The Utah State Department of Natural Resources and other agencies are trying to be proactive in hopes of avoiding wide-spread tree mortality along the Wasatch Front.

What is the spruce bark beetle?

- The spruce bark beetle is the principle agent of mortality in mature spruce trees. This beetle is “endemic” meaning that it occurs wherever spruce grow naturally in North America. The beetle is usually present in areas of weakened or wind thrown trees and reproduce rapidly in fallen trees.

Why should I be concerned?

- Sporadic outbreaks have destroyed wide areas of spruce trees. If the beetle population becomes large enough, it easily attacks and kills standing green trees. Spruce bark beetles prefer dense forests with large mature spruce trees, but younger trees may also be killed during outbreaks. Alta has a large population of similarly aged, mature, large-sized spruce—a primary host for these beetles.

What is the Town of Alta doing to help?

- The Town of Alta will be organizing volunteers in the spring/summer of 2010 to survey private property in the Town to identify trees that are infested with spruce bark beetle. Property owners will be notified if infested trees are found on their property.
- In addition, the Town will be assisting the State Department of Natural Resources in disseminating timely information regarding this situation.

What can I do as a property owner in the Town of Alta?

- Become educated and be proactive. Learning how to identify signs of spruce bark beetle infestation—so trees can be removed timely—may go a long way towards preventing future generations from hatching and spreading.

What if I have infested trees on my property?

- Infested trees should be removed as soon as possible. The Mayor will issue approval to remove infested trees. Please contact the Town when you have an infested tree so we may keep track of locations of infestations and tree removal.

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- Trees should be chipped or burned onsite to avoid spreading the beetle to outside locations. A certified arborist will be able to provide more information. A list of approved and certified arborists, provided by the U.S. Forest Service, will be available on the Town's website as listed below.

What can I do to protect my healthy spruce trees?

- Trees may be sprayed with Carbaryl, an insecticide that is effective for deterring spruce bark beetles for two years. These are preventative sprays only, and can be applied only to healthy, non-infested trees. If you decide to spray viable healthy spruce trees, it is recommended to continue spraying until the threat subsides, which may not be for many years. However, Carbaryl is not an approved insecticide for use in the Salt Lake City Watershed. Special permissions and restrictions will apply.
- Due to watershed concerns, and because there is snow currently on the ground, no spraying can take place until snow melts the following summer. Updated information on spraying will be available on the Town's website as it becomes available.

Where can I get more information?

- A guide on how to identify spruce trees and signs of infestation, and much more will be posted soon on the Town's website under: http://www.townofalta.com/about_new.shtml
- Updates will be noted in the Town's monthly e-newsletter (to subscribe, please email CER@townofalta.com)

How can I get involved?

- The Town will be looking for volunteers to help us survey infested trees in the Town of Alta in the spring/summer of 2010. If you are interested in volunteering, please contact Claire Runge as provided below.

What does the future look like?

- The reality is that Alta is not a closed system. The presence of spruce bark beetle in Big Cottonwood Canyon and Heber Valley mean that the possibility of spruce bark beetle infestation in Alta will not be going away in the near future. The Town remains committed to working with the State Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Forest Service, Alta Ski Area, and Friends of Alta to help provide resources and information to our property owners.
- To protect and prevent trees from being lost, surveying may happen every year for several years until the threat has subsided to protect and prevent trees from being lost. It is realistic however to expect loss of trees.

Disclaimer:

- The Town respects all private property, and will not survey your property if desired. Please let us know in writing as soon as possible if that is the case.

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