

Bark Beetle Battle Given Historic Treatment

A fascinating historical account of the combined efforts of three government agencies to eradicate the mountain pine beetle (*Dendroctonus ponderosae*) in one particular area is contained in the recent publication, ***The Battle Against Bark Beetles in Crater Lake National Park: 1924-34***, by Boyd E. Wickman, research entomologist with the USFS Forestry and Range Sciences Lab in LaGrande, OR.

The report records the first large-scale bark beetle control project in a national park in the Pacific Northwest. It describes the relations among NPS, USFS, and USDA Bureau of Entomology personnel, how the project was organized, the ecological implications of the outbreak, and the long-term results of direct control measures.

Long-range historical light is shed on the activities of the first year (1925) – the insect situation, the main human characters involved, the recommendations from all participants in the decision-making, and the treatments administered. The 8-year “war” that ensued is covered in detail, with historical photos, memos and correspondence from old files, even cartoons of the time.

Wickman, in a section titled “The Aftermath,” concedes that “hindsight is often 20/20, but it is hard not to give the beetles credit for defeating the puny efforts of the entomologists to stop the infestation.” He points out that most of the lodgepole pine stands in the area of infestation were at a susceptible age for attack and that control efforts were of little avail.

“The main lesson learned,” Wickman writes, “was that once a mountain pine beetle population erupts over a large area of susceptible forest type, and as long as environmental conditions remain favorable, there really is no way to stop it until almost all the susceptible trees are either killed or removed by logging.”

In 1984, lodgepole pine stands in central Oregon were once again ravaged by the mountain pine beetle, Wickman notes, and by 1985 a severe outbreak covered thousands of acres and extended south nearly to the park boundary. “In 1986, beetle-killed trees were found in the northern end of the park,” he writes. “We found groups of lodgepole pine being attacked by the mountain pine beetle, so we have come full circle with a new outbreak in progress.”

As an epilogue, Wickman tacks on a ditty by an anonymous author that was published in 1925 in a Western Division newsletter, ***Forest Insect Investigations***, put out by the Bureau of Entomology, Stanford University. In part, it goes like this:

The Song of a Park Ranger

The bugs, they're killing the timber
They've worked for many a year,
But the entomologists prophesy
That they'll quickly disappear.

Chorus:

Oh! they ain't gwine fly no more, no more,
They ain't gwine fly no more:
But how in the ---- can the bug men tell
They ain't gwine fly no more.

For the rest of the song, see the PNW-GTR-259, available from USDA Pacific Northwest Research Station, 319 S.W. Pine St., PO Box 3890, Portland, OR 97208.