



Southern Utah's Pinion Dilemma

By Heather O'Hanlon and Esther Benson

The Bureau of Land Management lands in most of Utah are under siege from Ips Beetles. After multiple years of drought the Pinion and Juniper trees are fragile and unable to defend themselves against disease and infestation. Because of this weakened condition, Ips Beetles are heading up the attack on the Pinion/Juniper forests of Utah. Until our drought situation improves, it is up to you to be careful with your campfires, where you smoke and how you handle equipment that can cause sparks outdoors. One campfire left unattended could mean devastation of an entire woodland or forest.

The "Pros and Cons" of the solutions to deal with the problem and conditions of the woodlands/forests are more complicated and costly than effective. Options include thinning of woodlands/forests, however, thinning needs to occur at the right times or beetles will fly as many as two miles away. Concurrently, it takes a lot of time and money for a solution with an unknown chance of being successful. Chemical treatments are also effective; nevertheless, this option is very expensive. Every tree must be sprayed and completely treated. Another option to deal with the beetles is prescribed burns. In spite of this, getting these landscape burn projects through the system take time and are at times environmentally sensitive. Yet if nothing is done, "dead and down" fuel build up will further complicate the fire behavior. Ultimately, all of these solutions will be ineffective if the drought continues. What nature needs is water and time to recover from the drought.

According to the U.S. Geological Survey, long term forecasts based on past history are less than desirable. The earth is expected to go into a dry phase that could last as long as 20 years. Primarily, winters will produce less moisture. For additional information go to web address; <http://water.usgs.gov/pubs/FS/fs-037-03/TMP82d48d4aw6.htm> and <http://geopubs.wr.usgs.gov/fact-sheet/fs119-02/>.

Despite the grim outlook, the perspective of geologists will give us hope, "Things are as they always have been." A deeper look into history will show that the earth has already been through cycles such as these before.

So what does all this mean to the woodlands and forests of Utah? The current situation will probably not drastically improve in the near future without some type of intervention and a lot of precipitation over the next few years. In the mean time, the Bureau of Land Management and other agencies are looking into cost-effective and timely solutions to deal with the situation in the forests and woodlands of Southern Utah. Remember, only you can prevent wildfires! Do your part, don't start wildfires!

For more information contact your local BLM office.