



Forest Service

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News Release

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National Forest works to minimize impacts of Gypsy Moth

(July 19, 2016) - Blacksburg, Va - The USDA Forest Service is working to minimize damage to Virginia woodlands caused by gypsy moths. The gypsy moth is one of the most destructive pests threatening the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests.

Gypsy moth caterpillars feed on tree leaves, damaging and even killing trees. Trees that are repeatedly defoliated by gypsy moths have a high risk of dying. Because oak leaves are a favorite food of gypsy moth caterpillars, oak forests are particularly susceptible to defoliation.

The Forest Service will be conducting egg mass surveys to determine the density of gypsy moth populations in Bland County. “During wet seasons like we are having this year, a fungus that kills gypsy moth larvae naturally tends to increase, helping control gypsy moth populations,” says Jesse Overcash, Wildlife Biologist. “Egg mass surveys will help determine if population counts are high enough to recommend treating infested forest areas.” Treatments would occur in the spring of 2017 if deemed necessary.

The Forest Service, the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and the Virginia Division of Forestry work together to conduct aerial spraying to control gypsy moth populations. This year over 12,000 acres are being treated to slow the spread of gypsy moth in Bland, Smyth, and Wythe counties. Forest areas infested with gypsy moth may be treated using Btk, a bacterial insecticide, and Gyp-Check, a gypsy moth specific virus that kills only gypsy moths and leaves other insects unharmed. Both methods are harmless to people.

Improving forest health is another way to prevent tree death from gypsy moth infestations. Healthy trees are more likely to survive and recover from defoliation caused by gypsy moths. George Washington and Jefferson National Forest employees improve tree and forest health through actively managing the forest by thinning areas and prescribed burning. Forest thinning removes smaller trees that would otherwise be a target for initial gypsy moth infestations.

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Gypsy moths are an invasive species that were first introduced in Massachusetts in 1869. Since then, the moth has spread south and west at approximately 5-10 miles per year. In the last 10 years, the gypsy moth has spread across the southwestern counties of Virginia.

If you have a concerns about gypsy moths on your property, call your local County Administrator's Office or the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.

For more information about spraying on the National Forest, please contact the Eastern Divide Ranger District (540) 552-4641. For information about spraying on private lands, please contact Virginia Department of Consumer Services (540) 394-2507.

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