

**Fire and Forest
Need Public on GSOB**

by Mike Esnard

(from The Town Crier - June 2014)

We had a wonderful GSOB kick-off lunch this past Friday. The Fire Safe Council, with fantastic (and delicious) help from the Pine Cove Water District, sponsored a beautiful outdoor lunch behind the Mountain Resource Center to thank the volunteers who search the community for trees infected by the Goldspotted oak borer (GSOB). In addition to thanking the volunteers, it was also a time to update our knowledge, and UC Riverside experts Kevin Turner and Tom Scott spoke to the group and led a very helpful discussion of current knowledge and experience regarding the pest.

For those of you who are unfamiliar with the GSOB, it is a non-native beetle that showed up in San Diego County a decade ago and has devastated their oak population. Since the beetle cannot cross deserts on its own, the consensus is that it traveled to San Diego on trucks carrying infected firewood. It was identified in a dead oak in Idyllwild in November of 2012, and the community—UC Riverside, CalFire, US Forest Service, Fire Safe Council, Garden Club—was quick to act. Thus far 32 black oak trees have been identified and confirmed as infested and have been removed.

Our community is in the frontline concerning this destructive beetle. We are all hoping that early detection of infested trees and their removal will contain the spread and save our black oaks. (Black oaks are its principal target up here; live oaks are targets at lower elevations.) Losing our black oaks would be a catastrophe for the mountain communities, since they are such an important part of the biological community and provide shade and beauty to many homes.

Stopping the spread up here has two components: keeping infected firewood off the hill, and identifying infected trees before the beetles can mature and fly to other trees. Our success will depend to a large extent on

public awareness and involvement. Not buying oak firewood from off the hill, and helping to spot infected trees, are essential public actions to protect the oaks.

Not buying oak has been a theme for a while, especially aided by the Garden Club signs. But everyone can also help by simply paying attention to the black oaks around you and notice any that did not produce leaves this spring. If you do see an oak without leaves, please call the GSOB hotline at 659-8328 and someone will come out to check the tree.

Given the early identification of GSOB up here, both Kevin Turner and Tom Scott believe we have a good chance of limiting the spread. Tom told us he brags around the state about our volunteers and overall community support in fighting the bug. He believes we are the model to stop the pest. Let's prove him right.

On a happier note, I am pleased to announce that the Townhall meeting I had hoped for is going to happen on Thursday, June 26, at 6:00 PM at the Idyllwild Townhall. And we are very pleased that key fire chiefs will be present to speak and answer questions from the public. We will have Chief John Hawkins from Riverside County Fire, Chief Dan Felix from our district Forest Service, and Chief Patrick Reitz from Idyllwild Fire. This is a great opportunity to meet and engage these important public officials on all fire related issues.