

Fire and Forest
GSOB Growth and Response

by Mike Esnard

(from The Town Crier - November 2014)

A meeting last week of interested parties on the Goldspotted oak borer provides a good moment to take stock of where we are in relation to this destructive pest. GSOB is an invasive insect brought to San Diego County around 2004 and since then has devastated the oak trees of many San Diego communities. Traveling mainly in firewood, GSOB was found in Idyllwild by the sharp eyes of Cal Fire's Kathleen Edwards in 2012. Since then various groups and people have acted to stop the spread before it reaches outbreak proportions in the San Jacintos.

Kevin Turner and Tom Scott from UCR, Gregg Bratcher from CalFire, Edwina Scott from Fire Safe Council, and many volunteers have all worked together to contain the spread. The latest number of identified oak trees infested with the insect in Idyllwild-Pine Cove is 53, which is an encouraging number. It is likely that most of the trees identified do not represent recent spreading, but rather trees that have been infected from the first years of entry in the community. Put another way, we are not seeing a dramatic spike with this number, as one would see in an epidemic, but a modest upward slope, meaning it is spreading but not very fast.

What we need to contain the beetle and protect our oaks is a continuation of identification and removal of infected trees. A single tree can act in spring as a veritable GSOB factory, throwing as much as 8,000 insects into the surrounding area. Anyone who owns oaks or who regularly walks the neighborhoods can be a very helpful part of the early identification process. If you see a black oak that is keeping its leaves longer than others, and the leaves are crinkly and brown rather than full and yellow, please call the hotline (659-8328) to have people look at it.

No tree can be removed without the owner's permission, but we hope people understand that if you do have an infested tree, the best thing to do for all the oak trees around it is to have it removed.

One team that has been regularly searching for GSOB is composed of Doris Lombard, Ron Perry, and Elliott Taylor. Since the team was challenged to describe precise locations, Ron found a program that allows the team to take a picture of the tree with an iPad, allowing the picture and its GPS coordinates to be sent immediately to Kevin at UCR. You can imagine what an advance this was. Also helping in this mapping effort is Dan Dever, another skilled volunteer who maintains a data base of trees at the MCFSC.

At this point we need more volunteers to search for infected trees (call 659-6208), and we need more calls from the community to help spot them (call the hotline). We also need people to be extremely cautious about buying firewood, and we suggest no one buy firewood from off the hill. If you have firewood that you are unsure of, make sure you burn it this winter so GSOB can't fly in the spring.

Moving forward from this meeting, Edwina Scott will host a meeting of the volunteers to share best-practices, and she will organize another public meeting in the spring. At that time we hope that we will have more guidance from researchers on the use of pesticides for tree protection, which at this time is promising but not conclusive.