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September 6, 2018

Agencies collaborate on Chugach National Forest spruce beetle project

(Anchorage, AK) – The Alaska Department of Natural Resources’ Division of Forestry and the U.S. Forest Service have signed an agreement to begin spruce bark beetle mitigation work in the Chugach National Forest.

Signed August 29, the agreement is part of the Good Neighbor Authority program created in 2014 allowing the Forest Service to enter into cooperative agreements or contracts with states to perform watershed restoration and forest management services on National Forest System lands. Two Good Neighbor Authority agreements have been signed previously involving the Tongass National Forest. This is the first for the Chugach National Forest.

Alaska’s Division of Forestry crews will use chain saws to thin spruce trees to improve the health of the remaining trees, and to help prevent beetles from infesting high-value areas within the Kenai Peninsula Zone of the Chugach National Forest. The Granite Creek area is the first location identified for protection and enhancement of forest health. Additional priority sites in the forest at high risk for beetle infestation may be identified and added for restoration and protection work as funding allows. The three-year project will cost approximately \$95,000.

“Working with the State of Alaska is important in efforts to reduce the impact the beetles may have on the forest,” said Terri Marceron, Forest Supervisor for the Chugach National Forest.

The work will be done by state forestry wildland fire crews based in Palmer and Soldotna. Crews will use the work as pre-season training for the summer wildfire season and as project work during fire season.

“This project is another great example of how the Good Neighbor Authority program is allowing more work to get done in Alaska forests,” said Alaska State Forester Chris Maisch, director of the Division of Forestry. “Restoration work like this is critical to maintaining the overall health of the region’s forests to ensure the benefits we all enjoy and expect can be maintained into the future,”

Parts of Southcentral Alaska, particularly the Kenai Peninsula and the Mat-Su, have been heavily impacted by a recent spruce bark beetle outbreak, evidenced by thousands of dead, red-hued spruce trees visible in those two areas, as well as parts of Anchorage.

Spruce bark beetle outbreaks are a natural phenomenon that can't be prevented but can be managed. Spruce beetles feed and breed on wind-thrown, fallen, or injured trees wherever there are spruce forests. When conditions are right, beetle populations may outgrow the supply of weakened trees and move into nearby healthier trees, especially mature spruce stands. During the 1990s, a spruce beetle outbreak in Alaska was mapped on over 1.3 million acres based on statewide aerial surveys. In the past 35 years, spruce beetle outbreaks have resulted in the loss of an estimated three billion board feet of timber in Alaska.

For more information about spruce beetles in Alaska and how to protect individual trees and forest stands, go to <http://www.alaskasprucebeetle.org/>.

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