**Colorado Aerial Forest Health Survey - 2014**

**Weekly Status Report -2**

**7-11 July**

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This is the second of five weekly status reports on my role in the 2014 Colorado Aerial Forest Health Survey.

This week we were based in Gunnison and flew portions of the upper San Miguel River Basin, the Uncomaphgre River Basin, the Cimmarron River Basin, the Lake Fork of the Gunnison River Basin, the West Elk Mountains (Maroon Bells) and the upper Rio Grande Basin. Kelly Rogers (CSFS) and Rebecca Powell (USFS R-2) participated in the surveys of these areas.

A total of 16.8 hours of flying time were required to cover these areas.

**Spruce beetle** infestations intensified significantly in the Henson Creek Basin and in the mountains surrounding Lake San Cristobal and the upper Lake Fork of the Gunnison River near Lake City. This is part of the northern front of an outbreak that was first detected in the Weminuche Wilderness in 2003. Large areas of moderate to severe damage are now present. Small group kills were also detected in high elevation Engelmann spruce forests in several tributaries of the Little Cimarron and Cimarron River Basins. Some activity has been seen in these areas since 2012 but it appears to be intensifying.

Most spruce forests in the lower portions of the Rio Grande Basin have been decimated by **spruce beetle**. These stands have either no current activity or a trace of new attacks on trees of an intermediate crown class. Affected forests have taken on a gray cast that can be seen for miles.

Infestations are continuing at moderate to severe levels in the extreme western portions of the Basin near the headwaters of the Rio Grande

Mortality of small groups of ponderosa pine caused by **mountain pine beetle** was detected on Miller Mesa near Ridgeway for the second successive year. Levels of damage were similar to those detected in 2013.

Lodgepole pine forests on the slopes of Smuggler Mountain and in the Aspen Snowmass Ski area near Aspen remain free of **mountain pine beetle** infestations for the second successive year.

A scattering of **Douglas-fir beetle** infestations were detected in the upper San Miguel River Basin in the vicinity of Telluride. Moderate to severe levels of damage continued in the upper Uncompahgre River Basin from upper Dallas Creek east to Cow Creek and its tributaries and north to Ouray. High levels of damage have been mapped in this area since at least 2011.

**Douglas-fir beetle** activity continued in portions of the Lake Fork of the Gunnison River Basin with a number of large centers of tree mortality detected from Elk Creek south to Lake City and the lower elevations of the Henson Creek Basin.

Tree mortality by **Douglas-fir beetle** is continuing at moderate levels in portions of the Crystal River Basin from the community of Marble east to Mt. Sopris.

An outbreak of **fir engraver beetle** erupted into moderate and severe levels in white fir stands from the community of Portland south to Ouray. Low levels of damage were detected in this area during ground checks made in 2013.

Tree mortality by **western balsam bark beetle** was seen in most high elevation subalpine fir forests covered by the survey but was most conspicuous in the West Elk Mountains between McClure and Independence Passes. Most infested areas were classified as light.

Small pockets of aspen defoliation were detected in a several locations in the upper San Miguel River Basin, the Crystal River Basin, south of Aspen and the upper Rio Grande Basin. An area of aspen defoliation in the Roaring Judy Basin, north of Almont, was ground checked on 11 July. The defoliating insect for the second successive year was **large aspen tortrix**. Intensity of defoliation was not as severe as in 2013, however.

Several pockets of a silvery-blue discoloration of aspen foliage were detected south of Wagon Wheel Gap on the Rio Grande National Forest. An area of concentrated discoloration occurs in the Roaring Fork Branch of Goose Creek. A second area of discoloration occurs at the southern end of a large area of aspen defoliation visible from the highway near Wagon Wheel Gap. Cause of the discoloration is currently unknown.

Plans for next week are to fly out of Fremont County Airport near Cañon City and survey portions of the Wet Mountains, Waugh Mountain, South Park and Pike’s Peak.

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