

[From Spring 1995]

## **The Aftermath of the Southern Pine Beetle**

In response to the 1994 southern pine beetle (SPB) infestation on the Chincoteague Refuge, efforts have been refocused on removing dead trees and on reestablishing the forest in affected areas. Hence, heavy equipment has infiltrated the once pristine and relatively untouched stands of loblolly pines that surround portions of the Wildlife Loop and the Woodland Trail.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Region 5 hydro-ax has facilitated the cutting process, while the refuge's maintenance staff and equipment have been involved in piling and burning the cut trees. Several hundred trees have been cut in order to eliminate any safety hazards to visitors, to provide a quick recovery of the wildlife habitat value of the areas, and to reduce the potential for future large scale outbreaks of the SPB. A main objective of cutting the dead trees is to remove the threats they may pose to refuge visitors. Standing dead trees become increasingly unstable as they decompose. Therefore, in order to eliminate hazards from the trees along the Wildlife Loop and the Woodland Trail, the cutting effort has been concentrated directly adjacent to the trails.

Also, if left untouched for a longer period than necessary, the large areas of standing dead trees would be of little value to wildlife. In fact, areas that were once used extensively by endangered Delmarva Peninsula Fox Squirrels would be undesirable for many years to come. However, the restoration work will speed up the recovery process by removing the non-productive trees and replanting the areas with large sapling trees that would otherwise take years to become established naturally.

The refuge will purchase and plant approximately 100 native deciduous trees consisting mostly of water oaks and some red oaks. The planted oaks, along with the naturally regenerated pines, will provide the mix of species that will provide for more natural resistance to the SPB in the future. Due to the magnitude of the infestation, 100 or more trees can easily be planted within the bare areas.

Anyone who is interested in "Adopting-a-Tree" by purchasing and/or planting trees may contact the refuge at (804) 336-6122. The refuge will gladly provide additional information. In conjunction with the efforts of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, volunteers can help fight the SPB and restore the value and beauty of the forest at Chincoteague Refuge.

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