

[From Summer 1994]

Southern Pine Beetle Infestation on Refuge

Forested areas on the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge are currently under attack by the Southern Pine Beetle. Trees on the Wildlife Loop, as well as portions of the Woodland Trail, will be cut to prevent the spread of this destructive insect. These wooded areas are important habitat for the endangered Delmarva Peninsula fox squirrel. Fox squirrels depend on the loblolly pine forest for food and shelter, and a severe loss of these forest would have a detrimental impact on their population.

The Southern pine beetle typically begins an infestation by attacking trees weakened by flood, drought, disease or lightning. Females infest the trees and release an attractant, bringing other beetles to the tree. Males and females construct "galleries" in the inner bark of the trees where the female deposits her eggs. These winding, S-shaped tunnels may connect and cross, essentially girdling the tree. Additionally, a fungus carried by the beetle penetrates the wood and plugs up the water conducting system of the tree. After a tree has been fully occupied with adult beetles, they will shift to other nearby trees, possibly colonizing otherwise healthy trees. Eggs previously laid in the tree will mature and emerge from the tree in 30 to 40 days.

Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge has experienced other outbreaks of Southern pine beetles, most recently in 1983-84, when areas along Beach Road were clear cut. During coming months, crews will be removing infested trees, as well as a buffer zone of healthy trees, in order to attempt to halt the infestation. If you have any questions about the beetle, please contact the refuge at (804) 336-6122.

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