

Rapid City—Pennington County Emergency Management

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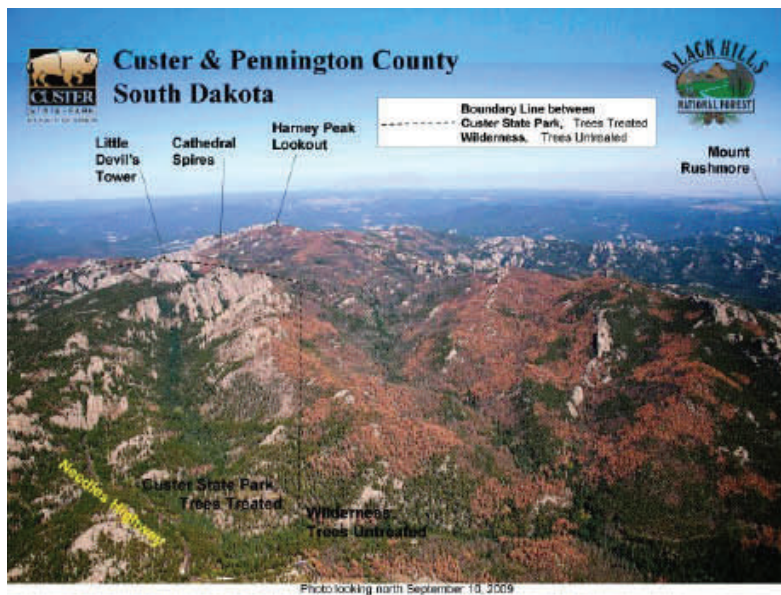
For Immediate Release

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MOUNTAIN PINE BEETLE INFESTATION

Thousands of acres of Black Hills forests continue to be destroyed as an epidemic of tree-killing insects, particularly the mountain pine beetle, continues its tenth year. The Black Hills area has experienced severe drought conditions for several years now, allowing the mountain pine beetle to infect more and more trees. Normally, the mountain pine beetle attacks small pockets of unhealthy or stressed trees scattered widely across the landscape. But beginning in the year 2000, beetle populations skyrocketed and large infestations took hold in many parts of the forest.

The infestation is worst in areas surrounding Deerfield Lake and the Bear Mountain Basin. Expanding pockets of beetle-killed trees are also present in the Norbeck Wildlife Preserve and Black Elk Wilderness Area, around Custer Peak, and near O'Neil Pass. In the photo below, the areas that are a reddish color at the tree tops have been infested.



At times, beetle populations increase dramatically. In the increasing and outbreak stages, any host trees, healthy and stressed, are attacked and killed. Just like the mountain pine beetle, wildfire does not recognize political boundaries and can affect public and private lands without discrimination. The standing dead timber with many trees still retaining their dried out needles, combined with the drought conditions, significantly increases

the potential for a catastrophic wildfire to rapidly spread throughout the area.

Efforts have been made to reduce the fuel load for the pine beetle to stop or slow the growth of any unwanted wildfire around the Mt. Rushmore area and other designated areas. While the Black Hills still invites people to enjoy the hills and all they have to offer, those enjoying the Black Hills forests are asked to be aware of the increased fire danger and how they use the forest.

Information compiled from the US Forest Service and the National Park Service.