

# Trees have new growth, pitch canker expert says

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SANTA CRUZ — A world-renowned pitch canker expert is happy the state has gone along with his recommendation not to cut down nearly 1,200 diseased trees along Highway 1.

As to whether or not the browning trees are in a "recovery stage" — as he predicted might occur three months ago — it's too early to tell.

L. David Dwinell, a plant pathologist with the U.S. Forest Service in Athens, Ga., returned to Santa Cruz this week to further study the disease that reportedly has spread to 2,000 to 3,000 pines in a 23-square-mile area of the county.

Dwinell will be coming to Santa Cruz every six weeks or so to assist in a pitch canker research project being conducted by the U.S. Forest Service and the California Department of Forestry.

It was partially because of Dwinell's advice last March that the state Department of Transportation decided against preliminary plans to cut up to 1,200 diseased pines along Highway 1 between Santa Cruz and Aptos. Original plans were to cut any tree that was 25 percent or more infected.

Dwinell, who has done full-time research on the fungus for the past 10 years, said the state "should just back off and not overreact." He said the epidemic could "alleviate itself" in two or three years.

Since then, Caltrans has decided to cut down only 62 trees — those that are dead. Two-thirds of the cutting will take place in the fishhook area, where highways 17 and 1 meet. The work is expected to begin within two weeks, after county officials OK noise-level readings and photographs of the area.

The county Transportation Com-

mission also wanted "written assurance" that Caltrans would mitigate all noise and visual impacts caused by the cutting, said Transportation Commission Executive Director Linda Wilshusen.

Dwinell is happy that many of the infected trees do not appear to be worsening — in fact, many are sprouting new growth. Yet, he cautioned that it is common to see new growth occur in pines this time of year.

At the same time, Dwinell supports the state's plan to do a comprehensive local highway landscape plan. That plan could include more cutting, as well as a replanting program with some other kinds of trees.

It is generally understood that most of the pines along highways 1 and 17 were planted too densely and are already beyond their life expectancy.