

# Douglas fir engraver beetle killing thousands of trees in Summit area

By KEITH MURAOKA  
Sentinel Staff Writer

**SANTA CRUZ** — Thousands of Douglas fir trees in the higher elevations around Bonny Doon and the Summit area are dying from an outbreak of Douglas fir engraver beetle.

California Department of Forestry service forester Steve Smith told The Sentinel that the beetle infestation has reached "epidemic proportions," spurred by last year's relatively dry spring.

He says if this spring is equally dry, an even more very serious problem will occur — one that could affect the entire county. So far, he estimates 2 to 5 percent of the Douglas firs in the Santa Cruz Mountains have been affected, which amounts to thousands of trees.

Douglas firs usually populate the higher elevations around Bonny Doon, Summit Road and Skyline Boulevard.

Smith says the first sign of engraver beetle attack on the trees involve faded green needles. The needles will then turn red and drop. Trees can die in a matter of two weeks.

The last time such an infestation occurred locally was in 1958-59, according to Smith.

Insect infestations, of course, aren't new to the San Lorenzo Valley. The area presently is also experiencing a gypsy moth infestation. In 1981, the Mediterranean fruit fly attacked.

Beginning in March, a 250-acre area surrounding Felton is scheduled to be sprayed aerially and by ground crews of the California Department of Food and Agriculture to eradicate the gypsy moth. An informational meeting about the spray-

ing will be held at 7:30 p.m. Jan. 29 at Felton Community Hall.

Smith says the best control of the engraver beetle is early detection. He recommends homeowners prune away any dead wood on trees as soon as possible to prevent beetles from spreading to the entire tree. The beetles normally attack underneath the bark on stems and branches.

He also maintains that weak, unhealthy trees are most vulnerable to attack. "The best prevention is to maintain a healthy fir," he says. "Pruning should be done now, watering only in spring and spring

fertilization should only be done if the tree is stressed."

Spraying with the insecticide lindane is another possible preventive measure. Spraying is difficult, however, due to the extreme height of Douglas firs.

Engraver beetles are usually kept in check by natural predators, says Smith. Last year's dry spring, though, killed many of those natural predators while allowing the beetles to spread.

Douglas firs along Bonny Doon Ridge have been particularly hard hit by the beetles, he adds. Many of those trees were the same that were hit by lightning storms last winter and have been under stress.