

Trees 12-16-86 Monterey pines may be cut down

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SANTA CRUZ — Some 300 trees along Highway 1 between Santa Cruz and Aptos may have to be cut down because of a spreading pitch-canker disease that is afflicting area Monterey pines.

Marty Cookman, landscape supervisor of Santa Cruz County for the state Transportation Department, told The Sentinel that there is "basic agreement that all affected trees be cut down."

However, no formal decision to take them out has yet been made. Cookman said such a decision should be coming from Caltrans' San Francisco office in January.

Many of the affected trees are located at the fishhook — where Highways 1 and 17 meet, as well as near New Brighton State Beach in Capitola. Some of the trees are 60 feet high. Many trees provide a sound barrier to homes adjacent to Highway 1.

"As far as we know, there is no treatment other than cutting them down," said Cookman of the disease that is widespread in the Southeast.

Were the order to cut them down made, it would mean an enormous four or five-month-long process for the local landscape crew of six, said Cookman. In all likelihood, the state would hire an outside tree service.

Other potential problems to be resolved involve disposing of the diseased wood. The best known method calls for burning the debris at the site. Cookman conceded that would be a problem since the trees are so close to the highway.

The disease was detected in Santa Cruz last July. It has since spread to a 23-square-mile area from Natural Bridges State Beach on Santa Cruz' west side to State Park Drive in Aptos.

The pitch-canker is carried by insects that infest pine cones and spread down branches. Affected trees have yellow branch tips that turn a reddish-brown before dying.

The disease itself usually does not kill trees. Instead, it leaves them weakened and easy prey to other diseases or infestations from insects.

Monterey pines are the most prevalent local tree to catch the disease. They are second in number only to redwoods. The disease also affects Aleppo and Bishop pines.

The county Agricultural Commissioner's Office has already discussed the possibility of a future quarantine at local Christmas tree farms and wholesale nurseries should the disease continue to worsen.