

## Udall to tackle 'sea of red' pine trees

By Gary Harmon

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The "new forest" of northern Colorado and southern Wyoming can be shaped by national legislation in stands that now are dominated by red and skeleton-like lodgepole pines, a U.S. Forest Service report says.

The report, which U.S. Sen. Mark Udall, D-Colo., sought a year ago, says a multitude of causes combined to make the forest vulnerable to the depredations of the mountain-pine beetle.

The result was a fast-moving epidemic that killed millions of trees in the high country of both states, posing the constant threat of fire and damage to human lives and property, and damaging the economy in the form of polluted watersheds and red-tinged vistas of dead pine standing.

The study's findings will guide him in supporting provisions that have been shown to help the Forest Service and other agencies protect communities and restore watersheds in beetle-kill and wildfire-risk areas, Udall said in a statement.

The bark-beetle outbreak, according to the Forest Service report, has roots in drought, climate change, lack of commercial and noncommercial thinning, a policy of wildfire suppression and the denuding of forests as trees were cut to accommodate gold and silver mining at the turn of the 20th century.

The report, however, ignores the contributions of national forest policy aimed at implementing a national rule governing management of roadless areas, a natural-resources attorney from Wyoming said.

The bark-beetle infestation is "directly tied to the (Forest Service's) and politicians' insistence upon adopting a rule that prevented the foresters and timber-lumber companies from protecting our forests," said Harriet Hagaman, a Cheyenne attorney who represented Wyoming in litigation against the national roadless rule.

Among the measures recommended in the report are emergency authority for the Forest Service to clear dead trees for a reasonable cost and reauthorization of an agreement for the U.S. Forest Service to work with the Colorado State Forest Service.

Udall said he expects to introduce a bill early in 2012.

Humans also failed to appreciate the power of the infestation and resisted active-management efforts, the report says.

"Many did not believe, looking at green trees that had been attacked by bark beetles, that they had actually been killed," the report says.

Public acceptance followed more readily when the trees turned red, but it was too late by then for the Forest Service to implement "active preventive forest management measures," the report says.

The infestation stemmed from a 1997 blow-down of hundreds of trees in the Routt National Forest, Hagaman said, but the report makes no mention of the incident.

By 2002, the beetles moved beyond the blow-down area and "marched outward from that area since then, leaving a 'sea of red' in their wake," Hagaman said.

Failing to acknowledge the blow-down and its effects sets the stage for a repeat of history, Hagaman said.

The report acknowledged treatments such as timber harvest and thinning could have helped, but there was a general lack of public acceptance of logging, and it noted Colorado's timber industry has declined by 63 percent since 1986.

U.S. Rep. Scott Tipton, R-Colo., said the report "clearly shows that proper forest management would have helped make the lodgepole pine more resistant to drought and infestation."

He also called for the Colorado delegation to work together to ensure "that there is sufficient access to our forests and resources available for proper management."

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