

LOCAL NEWS

Emerald ash borer could cause \$82 million impact in metro Denver, report says

About 15 percent or more of Colorado's urban and community forests are made up of ash trees, making this insect a huge threat statewide due to the human transport of infested wood.

By Elizabeth Hernandez

The Denver Post
The Denver Post

Posted: Thu Feb 18 13:25:38 MST 2016

An exotic pest that has damaged trees in Boulder is expected to spread to metro Denver and could cost millions of dollars in dead and dying trees, according to a new report on the health of Colorado's forests.

The emerald ash borer, a **wood-boring pest native to Asia**, "has the potential to be the most devastating insect Colorado's urban forests have ever seen," according to a 32-page report released by the Colorado State Forest Service.

"The potential economic impacts of (emerald ash borer) in the metro Denver area alone could be as high as \$82 million, based on a loss of annual services provided by the canopy cover, and not including potential costs for ash tree removal, treatment and replacement," the report said.

The emerald ash borer has **caused problems in Boulder since 2013** and has been confirmed in several new locations within Boulder city limits, the report said.

The tens of millions of dollars lost includes consequences like property values falling, rainfall interception reduction and less carbon dioxide storage.

The pest has not been detected elsewhere in the state.

Colorado must prepare for the beetle's "imminent speed," the report said.

The beetle was first found in Michigan in 2002 and has since killed millions of ash trees throughout the Midwest, the East and Canada.

About 15 percent or more of Colorado's urban and community forests are made up of ash trees, making this insect a huge threat statewide due to the human transport of infested

wood.

"It is now considered the most destructive tree insect ever to be introduced into North America," the report said.

While the 32-page report gave a comprehensive look at the more than 1.5 million acres the **spruce beetle** has impacted in the state over the past two decades, it also zeroed in on other areas of concern.

The report also addressed Colorado residents living on the brink of wildland vegetation and wildfire risks.

This population grew from 980,000 people in 2000 to more than 2 million people in 2012 and continues to grow.

Lastly, the report mentions the need to engage those in the forest products industry, who have the power to improve forest management work, overall.

As a possible solution, the Colorado Forest Products Program hopes to increase awareness about the state's wood products industry.

"Creating a demand for Colorado wood incentivizes landowners and timber harvesters to help land managers meet forestry objectives," the report said. "Yet more than 90 percent of wood-based products Coloradans use are imported."

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