

1.3.4 Mountain Pine Beetle

The Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts (MTCA) is responsible for managing the Province's 1300 recreation sites and 800 recreation trails. The current mountain pine beetle (MPB) infestation in British Columbia spans more than 10 million hectares and is impacting nearly half of the recreation sites and trails in the province. To address concerns related to the MPB outbreak, MTCA is implementing a MPB Mitigation Program funded by the Federal MPB Program.

Two years of funding received from the Federal MPB Program (\$1.435 million) assisted MTCA to address the MPB problem at recreation sites and trails, and helped keep the sites and trails open, safe and accessible to the public. The first year of the MPB mitigation program concluded on March 31, 2008.

The overall objectives of the recreation site and trail MPB Mitigation Program are to:

- Ensure that safety, public health and environmental issues are addressed on provincially designated recreation sites and trails affected by MPB infestations;
- Minimize the negative economic impacts to tourism and local communities; and
- Restore recreation resource values at recreation sites and trails affected by the MPB.

Management activities under the program include: site assessments and prescriptions; field operations (tree removal, bucking and piling firewood, piling and burning limbs/debris); public communications; and program monitoring, reporting and adjustment.

During the winter months of 2007/08, the program was successful in treating 166 recreation sites and nine recreation trails. Approximately 20,500 dead and dying trees were felled. In addition, 30 Archaeological Impact Assessments were completed.

Treatments were concentrated in the developed areas of recreation sites and trails (e.g., campsites, outhouses). Felled trees were bucked and piled for firewood, and limbs and fine materials were piled and burned.

The majority of treated areas will need to be re-assessed in the spring of 2008 to address the continuing spread of MPB and assess remaining fuel management concerns resulting from heavy volumes of bucked firewood remaining on site and snow levels hampering efforts to pile and burn residual limbs from felled trees.

Due to lower than expected unit costs for treatments, expenditures for 2007/08 were approximately \$677,277. The approved budget for 2007/08 was \$685,000. It is worthy to note that the MPB Mitigation Program contributed to short-term economic benefits in a number of small, rural communities where many of the contractors utilized to deliver the mitigation treatments are based.