



Forest Health Hazard Warning: Frequently Asked Questions

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1. Who is DNR/Peter Goldmark? Why did I get this letter?

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) manages 5.6 million acres of forest, range, agricultural, aquatic, and commercial lands for the people of Washington. We also provide forest fire protection, enforce the Forest Practices rules, and provide Forest Landowner Assistance services for all state and private forest land in Washington.

The Commissioner of Public Lands, Peter Goldmark, is an elected public official in charge of managing the Department of Natural Resources. Under the Forest Health Law RCW 76.06, the Commissioner of Public Lands is designated as the state of Washington's lead for all forest health issues.

A Forest Health Hazard Warning was issued for portions of Okanogan, Ferry, Klickitat, and Yakima counties. You received a letter, because you own forested property in the Warning area and state law requires notice of a Forest Health Hazard Warning be provided to all forest landowners in the affected area. Just because your forest is within the Warning area boundary and you received a notice in the mail, it does not mean your forest conditions are at risk from the insects identified in the Warning notice. The basis for the Warning is that a substantial proportion of the forested landscape within the Warning area is vulnerable to damage from forest insects. Your forest may or may not be at risk. You need to assess your individual forest conditions, with the help of professional foresters, to determine if your forest is at risk from these insects. And if it is, we want to help you to reduce that risk.

2. What is a Forest Health Hazard Warning?

A Forest Health Hazard Warning is a way to alert landowners that a problem exists in their area. The goal is to slow the development of threats to forest health or address existing threats to forest health. The Commissioner of Public Lands, under authority found in the Forest Health Law RCW 76.06, is in charge of deciding whether to issue forest health hazard warnings. A Forest Health Hazard Warning describes specific actions landowners can take to reduce identified threats to forest health. The purpose of a Forest Health Hazard Warning designation is to call attention to an emerging forest health issue and focus actions and resources on addressing it.

The effect of a Forest Health Hazard Warning is advisory only; actions by landowners to address identified forest health threats are strictly voluntary.

3. Why was a Forest Health Hazard Warning issued?

Due to fire suppression and a lack of active management, severe forest health concerns exist throughout much of eastern Washington. Today's forests are much less diverse, have different mixes of tree species, and exhibit more over-crowded conditions compared to what one would have found historically. A Forest Health Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) of forest health experts was convened by Commissioner Goldmark in January 2012 to evaluate threats to forest health and determine areas where a Forest Health Hazard Warning may be warranted under RCW 76.06.

The TAC evaluated recent, current, and likely future damage from forest insects and diseases to prioritize areas of eastern Washington that warranted further action under state law. The TAC also evaluated forest conditions that foster insect and disease outbreaks, the ability of damage agents to spread to multiple ownerships, and the likelihood of treatments being successfully implemented in different areas of eastern Washington.

Based on the recommendations and findings of the TAC, Commissioner Goldmark issued a Forest Health Hazard Warning for portions of Okanogan, Ferry, Klickitat and Yakima Counties. The primary damage agents identified in the warning areas are western spruce budworm and pine bark beetles. The reason for issuing a Warning is that forest insects, primarily western spruce budworm and pine bark beetles, are causing significant damage and current forest conditions are vulnerable to further spread.

Okanogan and Ferry Counties are currently experiencing a western spruce budworm outbreak. Western spruce budworm is a caterpillar that eats the needles of Douglas-fir and other fir trees. The outbreak has lasted for several years and all indications are that the outbreak will continue to increase in intensity and extent within the warning area. The primary forest type within the warning area is mixed conifer forests dominated by Douglas-fir that provides excellent habitat for budworm. Western spruce budworm consumes the needles of a variety of trees, but favors Douglas-fir and fir trees. Trees can withstand several years of defoliation, however, the duration and intensity of budworm outbreaks in eastern Washington have been increasing over the last several decades as forest conditions have changed to favor budworm. Five or more years of defoliation can significantly weaken trees so that they may die and also become susceptible to being killed by other damage agents, such as fir bark beetles.

The Forest Health Hazard Warning was also issued for pine bark beetles in ponderosa pine. Ponderosa pine is the most common pine tree found on private forestlands in eastern Washington. There are three major bark beetles that attack ponderosa pine: mountain pine beetle, western pine beetle and *Ips pini* (pine engraver). These bark beetles feed in the phloem and inner bark of the tree and they also promote the spread of a fungus which blocks the tree's ability to use water. These bark beetles are native insects and are usually present at low levels in most forests where ponderosa pine exists. Healthy trees can resist attacks when bark beetle populations are low by producing pitch that thwarts the beetle attack. Trees are susceptible to bark beetles when they are stressed, damaged or weakened. Drought and/or dense forest stand conditions can weaken trees so that normally healthy trees cannot produce enough pitch to resist the bark beetles.

4. What is the purpose of a Forest Health Hazard Warning?

The purpose of a Forest Health Hazard Warning designation is to call attention to an emerging forest health issue and focus actions and resources on addressing it. A Forest Health Hazard Warning recommends specific actions for landowners to reduce identified threats to forest health. Forest insects do not respect property boundaries. One of the primary goals of a Forest Health Hazard Warning is to focus the attention of all landowners (federal, state, tribal and private) to address the forest conditions that help the insects and work together to make a meaningful impact.

The effect of a Forest Health Hazard Warning is advisory only - actions by landowners to address identified forest health threats are completely voluntary.

5. How do I know if my land is in the Warning area?

If you received a Forest Health Hazard Warning notice in the mail then your property is most likely within the Warning area boundary.

Please [click here](#) to see a map of the Okanogan/Ferry Counties Forest Health Hazard Warning map.

Please [click here](#) to see a map of the Klickitat/Yakima Counties Forest Health Hazard Warning map.

6. I believe my land is in the Warning area, what should I do?

Just because your forest is within the Warning area boundary and you received a notice in the mail does not mean your forest conditions are at risk from the insects identified in the Warning notice. The basis for the Warning is that a substantial proportion of the forested landscape within the Warning area is vulnerable to damage from forest

insects; your forest may or may not be at risk. You need to assess your individual forest conditions, with the help of a professional forester, to determine if your forest is at risk from these insects or other conditions.

To learn about damage signs to look for that can help you determine if western spruce budworm or pine bark beetles are currently active in your forest [click here](#).

Today's forests are much less diverse, have different mixes of tree species, and exhibit more over-crowded conditions compared to what one would have found historically. Recommendations to improve forest health include: thinning forests to reduce the number of trees and canopy layers, increasing the spacing between trees, favoring ponderosa pine and western larch, and working collaboratively with neighboring forest landowners to reduce risks and gain efficiencies. This isn't about logging all the forests. It's a recommendation to manage the forests to make them healthier.

To learn more about forest conditions that are susceptible to western spruce budworm and pine bark beetles and recommended actions for reducing risk [click here](#).

7. Who can I contact to learn more about the Forest Health Hazard Warning and how I can improve the health of my forest?

DNR foresters are available **free of charge** to help you assess the risks in your forest and develop site-specific actions you can take to improve the health of your forestland.

To contact a DNR forester by phone, please call **1-855-338-8200**.

To contact a DNR forester online please visit the following website and fill out the form:

http://www.dnr.wa.gov/Pages/forest_health_assistance.aspx

DNR Foresters

Okanogan County: Ron Wonch, (509) 684-7474, ronald.wonch@dnr.wa.gov

Ferry County: Ken Hendricks, (509) 684-7474, kenneth.hendricks@dnr.wa.gov

Klickitat or Yakima County: Joe Weeks, (509)925-0972, joe.weeks@dnr.wa.gov

We intend to respond to all landowner inquiries within two weeks. However, this is the first time the Commissioner has issued a Forest Health Hazard Warning letter. We don't know when or how many landowners will contact us. We are trying to be ready. We definitely want to talk to you about your questions and your forest conditions. Also, during August and September many DNR foresters also have responsibilities as firefighters. The response may be longer than two weeks but we are really trying to be available... Please call us back if you feel like you've been forgotten. 1-855-338-8200 (Toll free).

Private, professional consulting foresters are also available to help you manage your forestland.

To contact a consulting forester please visit the WSU Extension consulting forester directory online:

<http://ext.nrs.wsu.edu/publications/forestry/consultingdirectory.htm>

8. How soon will I hear back from someone? What if I don't hear back?

Every attempt will be made to respond to landowner inquiries within two weeks. However, we don't really know how many people will be contacting us and during August and September many DNR foresters are involved with

wildland firefighting. It may be longer than two weeks, but we really want to work with you. Please call us back if you feel like you've been forgotten at 1-855-338-8200 (Toll free).

9. Are there any financial resources available that can help us do these forest treatments?

Recommendations to improve forest health usually involve thinning or reducing the density of trees in a forest. In some cases thinning activities can return revenue and in other cases it can involve out-of-pocket costs to the landowner.

DNR has a limited amount of cost-share funds available to help cover some of the costs of non-commercial thinning and other practices in the Warning area. Cost-share funding usually will reimburse the landowner up to 50% of the cost of the treatment.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service and County Conservation Districts are other potential sources of funding for forest health restoration practices.

To contact your local Natural Resources Conservation Service field office please visit:

<http://www.wa.nrcs.usda.gov/contact/fieldoffices.html>

To contact your County Conservation District please visit:

<http://www.scc.wa.gov/index.php/District-News/Conservation-District-Locator-Map.html>

10. If my forest is in the Warning area, does that mean my trees are in imminent danger of dying?

No, it means that forest conditions in the general area will support uncharacteristic insect and disease outbreaks and you should assess if your specific property could benefit from management actions to improve forest health.

11. Am I legally required to do anything if I own forestland in the Warning area?

No, all recommendations are strictly voluntary.

12. How do you know what's happening with my forest?

DNR and the Forest Health Technical Advisory Committee are generally familiar and experienced with eastern Washington forest conditions. They used spatially explicit (GIS) forest data to analyze the health and condition of forests across eastern Washington. These data are useful for understanding forest health conditions on the scale of 100's of thousands of acres and not on the scale of a single forest ownership of 10 to 40 acres. Landowners should assess the health of their individual forestlands with the assistance of a professional forester.

13. I do not own any forestland, why did I get this notice?

We used the most current parcel information from the county property records to generate the mailing list. We queried the county property records to select parcels that were at least one acre in size and contained at least 0.5

acre of forest. Due to errors in the datasets queried to generate the mailing, some people who receive the notice will not have any forestland. If you do not own any forestland, we apologize for any confusion this may have created and ask that you disregard the notice.

14. I sold the land and no longer own any forestland.

We received your contact information from the county property records and used the most current parcel information available. However, there will be some address errors and some people who receive a notice may no longer own the forestland. If you know the address of the new or the correct owner, you can let us know and we will mail them a notice.

15. What if I can't afford any practices to improve the health of my forest?

Some forest health improvement practices can be implemented at no cost to the landowner and even return some revenue if your forest contains enough acreage of commercially viable forestland.

Cost-share funding is available to help landowners implement forest health restoration practices where the cost of the practice is greater than any revenue generated.

Contact a DNR forester to determine if your property would qualify for cost-share funding or if it contains enough volume for a commercial timber sale that will generate revenue.

If you can't or don't want to implement any treatments now, at least you have learned more about things to watch out for, you know some people are out there who want to help, and you may have some opportunity to improve your forest's health in the future.

16. Is there a deadline?

There is no hard and fast deadline associated with the Forest Health Hazard Warning. The problem of crowded forests with too many Douglas-fir and fir trees has been building for a long time, and it will take a long time to correct.

DNR recommends that landowners assess their forests for current damage and risks for future damage with the help of a professional forester as soon as possible, but not later than one year from now. Depending on the conditions of your forest and your goals and objectives, hazard reduction actions such as thinning should be considered.

17. I'm unsure what to do.

DNR recommends that you seek the assistance of a professional forester. This helps you accomplish three important things:

- Assess Risks: You'll get help assessing the risks in your forest or woodland.
- Set Your Goals: You'll discuss what is important to you about the trees on your land (such as scenery, timber production, fire protection, wildlife, or fish habitat).
- Make an action plan. Evaluate whether options, such as tree thinning or harvest, can help you reduce forest health hazards and meet your desired results. Develop an effective plan to do what is needed.
- Take Action: Finally, just do it!

18. I don't have a computer.

If you do not have access to a computer we can mail you factsheets that describe signs of forest damage, forest risk factors and recommended actions to reduce risk of damage from forest insects.

If you would like assistance from a DNR forester, please call toll free 1-855-338-8200.

19. Are you tracking what I do?

No, the Forest Health Hazard Warning is strictly advisory and any actions taken by landowners are voluntary.

20. What can you tell me about this bug I saw in my forest?

For more information about western spruce budworm and pine bark beetles please [click here](#). This document contains links to various factsheets on western spruce budworm and pine bark beetles that provide detailed information on pest identification, life cycle, damage and recommended actions.

If you have questions about a bug you can contact forest entomologist Glenn Kohler, (360)902-1342, Glenn.Kohler@dnr.wa.gov. It's difficult to identify and describe insects over the phone. It's usually best if you can send him a photo of the insect or if you have the specimen with you so you can describe it, answer his questions, and send it in for direct examination if requested.

21. I don't want to cut any trees.

Landowners in the Forest Health Hazard Warning areas are not required to cut trees. Often thinning the forest by removing diseased or slow growing trees is the best way to reduce hazards associated with forest insects, however, landowners are free to determine the best course of action for their forest. Lots of forest landowners have been doing things like thinning to improve forest health and reduce risk of wildfire in recent years. If your neighbors do some thinning, you may find that you like what you see. You can get in touch with us if you change your mind.

22. I only own a small amount of forest (less than 5 acres), is the Forest Health Hazard Warning applicable to me?

Forest insects do not respect property boundaries. If your small forest parcel is near other forest parcels with susceptible forest conditions then it is at risk.

If your property has scattered trees and is surrounded by farmland, or shrub steppe, then it is probably at lower risk for damage.

23. I already have a management plan and my forest is well managed. You should be going after my neighbor, the Forest Service or the state.

DNR is working with all landowners (federal, state, tribal and private) within the Warning area boundaries to reduce forest health hazards. DNR has mailed a notice to all landowners in the Warning area. DNR has also been meeting one-on-one with large landowners such as the US Forest Service, to identify priority areas within the Warning area to initiate larger, cooperative forest restoration projects.