

# **OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD, AND FORESTRY**

2800 North Lincoln Blvd Oklahoma City OK 73105-4298

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FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT

Contact Jack Carson (405) 522-4575

## **SOUTHERN PINE BEETLE THREAT DRAWS COST-SHARE FUNDS**

Oklahoma forestry officials announce that funding is available for forest landowners in southeastern counties to avert a beetle infestation that could potentially cost them more than \$200 million in damage.

“The Southern Pine Beetle is the most destructive forest pest in the south and Oklahoma has been fortunate to avoid a serious infestation since the 1970s,” said State Forester, John Burwell. “We have an endemic population of the SPB but conditions have not allowed them to reach destructive population levels for some time.”

“That’s why it is so critical that we act now to protect our pine forests,” he said. “Oklahoma has over 1.1 million acres of nearly pure pine stands and more than half are at risk from this beetle.”

Many of the pine plantations are overstocked making the trees highly susceptible and increasing the risk of population explosion of the beetle. Burwell said congress and the U.S. Forest Service has provided over \$133,000 in cost share funds as an incentive for forest owners to thin dense pine stands.

Commercial forestlands are eligible for up to \$40 per acre in cost share funds. Non-commercial forests may receive up to \$60 per acre.

“We are also providing some funding to help pay for landowners to hire private consultants to help create management plans for this work and supervise the thinning,” he said. “With the cost-share funds and the money the landowner receives for the timber, this is an attractive offer.”

The program targets forestlands in LeFlore, McCurtain and Pushmataha counties. Adjoining counties may be considered if the risks are deemed high enough based on U.S. Forest Service models.

Oklahoma Forestry Services foresters will assess applicant properties to ensure that the requested practices are needed and fit within the guidelines of the program. For more information contact the State Forester’s office at (405) 522-6158 or visit their website at [www.forestry.ok.gov](http://www.forestry.ok.gov).

The most recent outbreak of SPB occurred in 1999 and continues in Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi and South Carolina. The U.S. Forest Service’s risk rating system predicts that 25% of overstocked pine trees could be impacted over the next 15 years in all southern states.

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