

# Mountain Pine Beetle

Rocky Mountain National Park  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



Throughout western U.S. conifer forests, millions of trees are being killed by a tiny assassin. 17 species of native bark beetles are found regionally and in Rocky Mountain National Park; all have evolved with local forests. Burrowing through the outer bark of conifers, bark beetles lay eggs which hatch into hungry beetle larvae. Larvae consume the living inner bark of trees.

Recent warm winters and prolonged low precipitation have combined to favor beetles and weaken many evergreen trees. Hard winters with cold low temperatures can kill beetle eggs and larvae wintering under a tree's outer bark. Perhaps due to general climate warming, average winter temperatures in the Rocky Mountains have been higher than normal over the past ten years. These more mild temperatures have aided a widespread outbreak of beetles during a time when trees were weakened by drought.

Locally, bark beetles have been a significant factor in the death of most of the larger lodgepole pines in Grand County. Now, the bark beetles are spreading throughout the pine forests of the upper Colorado River drainage in this national park.

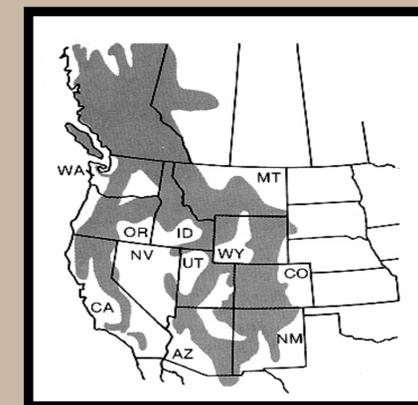
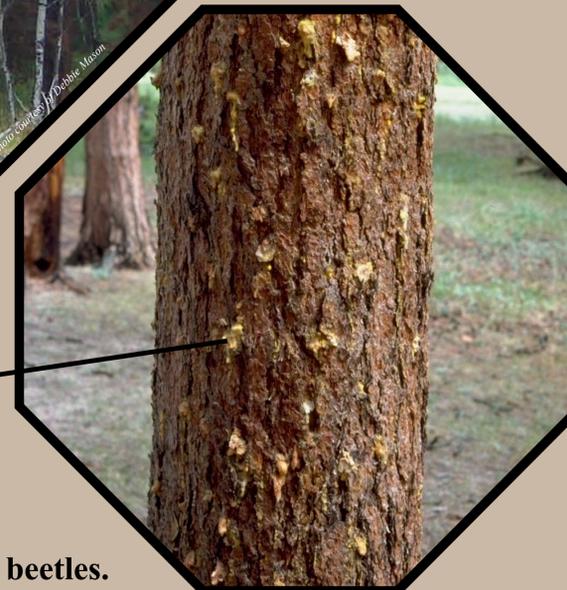
While there is little that can be done on a broad scale, the park is taking action in affected areas most used by park visitors. Where feasible, high value trees in prominent park areas are being sprayed with insecticide. Dead hazard trees are being removed in developed park areas, and where the park adjoins neighboring homes.



Adult Mountain Pine Beetle  
(actual size, 1/8 to 1/3 inch).



Yellow pitch marks a tree attacked by bark beetles.



The bark beetle infestation is throughout Western forests from Canada to Mexico, and has occurred several times previously in the past 500 years.