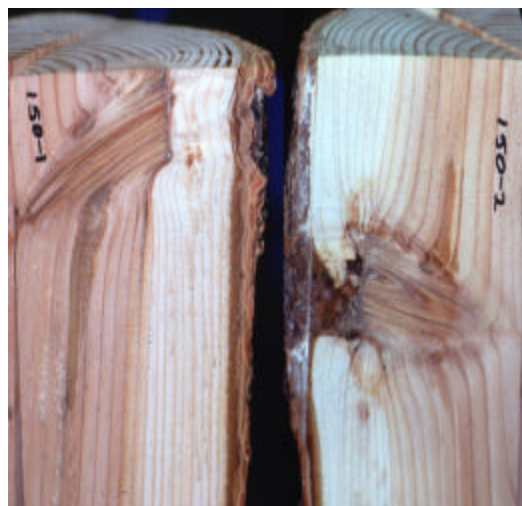


Can the Douglas-fir Pitch Moth, *Synanthedon novaroensis*, (Hy. Edwards) Ruin Pruning Investments?

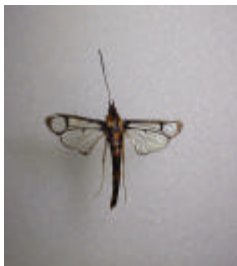
To better understand potential damage to pruned trees by the Douglas-fir Pitch Moth (DFPM), experiments were conducted by the Stand Management Cooperative at four locations in Western Washington on trees with breast-height age from 12 to 19 years. Two pruned branches from the same young Douglas-fir tree are shown. The left branch was not attacked by the DFPM and completely occluded within five years. The right branch was attacked and the pitch and bark pocket has not occluded 10 years after pruning. These pockets are defects that preclude achieving high value clear products. Increased pruning and earlier, more frequent thinning in Douglas-fir stands raises a concern that attack by the DFPM may also increase and reduce value.

Life Cycle and Range of the DFPM

Female DFPM's are active June through August and lay eggs at wounds exuding oleoresin on Douglas-fir trees. The larva feeds on the inner bark, which stimulates further production of resin that is mixed with excreta and formed into a pitch nodule. The larva maintains a gallery in the nodule where it usually pupates. Adults are active during the day and look more like a hornet than the typical moth. The period of development is commonly two years but ranges from one to three years. Attack by the DFPM may occur where pruning has cut live branches, pruning equipment has scarred the bole, or felling and skidding during thinning has damaged the bole. The DFPM ranges from Alaska to northern California and from the Pacific coast to Montana. It also attacks lodgepole pine, western white pine, Sitka spruce and Engelmann spruce.



Pruned branches from the same tree: left not attacked by DFPM, right attacked



Douglas-fir Pitch Moth

DFPM and Pruning

1. Does the DFPM attack branch wounds in preference to bole wounds?

Experiment: In spring, 100 trees had eight branches pruned near breast height with cuts just outside the branch collar. Eight artificial bole wounds, similar in size to the pruned branch diameter, were made near breast height on another 100 trees. Another 100 trees served as unpruned controls. The number of ovipositions was counted over two years. **Result:** None of

the control trees were attacked, 8% of trees pruned outside the branch collar were attacked, and 14% of bole wounded trees were attacked.

2. Does pruning through the branch collar alter the risk of attack?

Experiment: In spring, 200 trees were pruned to nine feet with cuts just outside the branch collar and 200 trees were pruned to nine feet with all cuts through the branch collar. Total number of ovipositions measured at the end of the year. **Result:** 116 (58%) of trees pruned through the branch collar were attacked, 2.4 times greater than attacks on trees pruned outside the branch collar (48 trees, 24%). Pruning through the branch collar also increased the number of ovipositions per tree; the 116 that were attacked with cuts through the collar had 291 ovipositions

or 2.5 per tree while the 48 attacked trees with cuts outside the collar had 73 ovipositions or 1.5 per tree.

Comment: This suggests that if Experiment 1 trees had been pruned through the branch collar, the incidence of attack may have been closer to 20% than 8%. Also note that in Experiment 1, only eight branches near breast height were pruned, whereas in Experiment 2 all branches up to nine feet were pruned.

3. Is risk of attack affected by season when trees are pruned?

Experiment: 100 trees in fall 1995, winter 1995/1996, spring 1996, and 100 in summer 1996 were pruned to nine feet with cuts just outside the branch collar. Ovipositions were recorded in fall 1996.

Result: Percentage of trees attacked was 5% if fall-pruned, 1% if winter-pruned, 13% if spring-pruned, and 2% if summer-pruned. Spring-pruned trees had significantly higher attack and winter-pruned trees had significantly lower attack than would be expected.

Comment: Experiment 3 suggests that the results from experiments 1 and 2, where trees were pruned in the spring, may reflect worst case scenarios.

4. If a tree is attacked, is it more likely to be reattacked?

Experiment: In 1961, 600 trees were pruned to 10 feet. After four years, 118 had been attacked by the DFPM. These, along with another 118 that had not been attacked, received a second pruning lift to 18 feet in May 1995. After a thinning in spring 1996, 84 and 75 trees, respectively, remained from these groups. The number of trees that had the second lift attacked was recorded after two years. **Result:** 10.7% of trees attacked after the first lift were attacked again after the second lift whereas only 3.9% of trees not attacked after the first lift reattacked after the second lift.

5. Is there a genetic preference?

Experiment: Five trees from each of six clones that had been wounded in February 1996 to stimulate bud

production had number of ovipositions recorded at the end of the growing season. **Result:** There was a significant difference in number of attacks between clones ranging from 15 attacks (three per tree) to two attacks (0.4 per tree). **Comment:** Experiments 4 and 5 suggest that there are differences in attractiveness of individual trees and clones to the DFPM. This may reflect differences in resin quality that influences selection behavior. Resin quantity and quality may also be involved in the seasonal risk of attack.

Recommendations

1. Avoid pruning through the branch collar.
2. Avoid scarring the bole while pruning.
3. Avoid pruning in spring.
4. Prune trees as early in the rotation as possible. In addition to reducing the size of the defect core, young trees have smaller branches, thinner bark and relatively fast growth rates which lead to much faster occlusion of pruned branches.
5. Try to identify and use clones less susceptible to DFPM attack.

References

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Contact:

Stand Management Cooperative
(206) 543-5355
moshea@u.washington.edu
<http://www.cfr.washington.edu/smc/>