



State of New Mexico
Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department

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Climate Change Impacting Tree Health in New Mexico
Forestry Division Forest Health Conditions Report points to exceptional drought and warming temperatures

SANTA FE, NM – Today, the Energy, Minerals and Natural Resources Department (EMNRD) Forestry Division released its [2020 Forest Health Conditions Report](#) and newly developed [Story Map](#) revealing significant impacts to trees on state and private land due to exceptional drought and warming temperatures.

According to the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration, 2020 was the second warmest and fourth driest on record in New Mexico. As a result, aerial surveys conducted last year by the Forestry Division and its partner, the USDA Forest Service, found a nine percent increase in insect and drought-stress damage since the year prior.

“Climate directly influences forest health on multiple levels,” said State Forester Laura McCarthy. “Lack of rain, warming temperatures, and an increase in carbon dioxide continually alter our forest ecosystems, increasing the risk of insect outbreaks and catastrophic wildfire.”

The most notable observations from the 2020 Forest Health Conditions Report include uncharacteristic yellowing on 15,000 acres of ponderosa forests from Catron to Mora County and increased activity from aspen defoliators, western spruce budworms, and piñon ips bark beetles in northern New Mexico, including areas east of Santa Fe and Albuquerque.

“Unfortunately, without enough water severely drought-stressed trees are more vulnerable to bark beetle attack because they cannot produce the sap needed to repel the pests,” said Dr. John Formby, Forest Health Program Manager, NM Forestry Division. “Bark beetle-related mortality may increase in the next few years unless drought conditions improve, which they are not predicted to do.”

For the first time, the Forestry Division is also using the ArcGIS Online Story Map platform to help New Mexico landowners better understand what is taking place in their area. The [NM Forest Health Conditions Story Map](#) includes interactive maps, a scrolling narrative text, and related images.

Landowners are encouraged to contact their local [Forestry Division District](#) to develop management plans that can lessen or prevent serious impacts from insects, disease, or drought-stress while also curbing the potential for catastrophic wildfire.

The public can access the [2020 Forest Health Conditions Report](#), [Forest Health Story Map](#), and updated [Forest Health Dashboard](#) on the Forestry Division website [here](#).



*Ponderosa with drought-stress discolored foliage in the Gurman Canyon area of the Zuni Mountains.
Photo courtesy Dan Ryerson, USFS.*



*Western Spruce Budworm Feeding Damage (orange foliage).
Photo courtesy Dr. John Formby, NM Forestry Division.*

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