

Report to Council



Date: May 7, 2012
File: 6130-07
To: City Manager
From: Blair Stewart, Urban Forestry Supervisor
Subject: Pine Beetle Update

Recommendation:

THAT Council receive for information the May 7, 2012 report from the Urban Forestry Supervisor on the status of pine beetle in Kelowna;

AND THAT Council approves staff applying for funding through the Union of BC Municipalities for the purpose of pine beetle and fire hazard management.

Purpose:

The Union of BC Municipalities requires a recent Council resolution in support of a staff application for pine beetle and fire hazard funding. This report also updates City Council on the current status of pine beetle in Kelowna.

Background:

British Columbia has experienced the largest mountain pine beetle (MPB) outbreak in history, with 17.5 million hectares of attack mapped as of 2010 (BC Ministry of Forests). The northern and central interior has already been devastated, whereas the southern interior is still experiencing large scale losses of native pine species.

A 2007 analysis of Kelowna's urban forest found that ponderosa pine comprises approximately 24% of Kelowna's total tree canopy, or about 600,000 trees. According to Provincial and Federal Government estimates, between 60-80% of these trees are expected to be lost by the year 2018. Infestation rates in the Kelowna area have proceeded at a slower pace than initially anticipated, for a number of reasons. Weather has been a major contributing factor and in some years there has been significant winter mortality of beetle broods. Efforts to manage and remove beetle attack in the valley, as well as a more diverse forest composition have likely also reduced the rate of spread.

However, large patches of infested pine trees have recently appeared, particularly in the northern and southeast sectors of the City. Over the past winter Parks crews identified roughly 1250 infested trees on 15 city properties that have now been removed. The largest concentrations of attack have been at Knox Mountain, Dilworth Mountain and Mission Ridge Parks as well as a large City property off June Springs Road. Private properties throughout

9v

Kelowna have also been observed with heavy infestation levels. Infested trees do not generally turn red until the following spring after attack, and it is likely that more dead or dying trees will be evident by June of this year.

In addition to MPB, the Okanagan has experienced increasing levels of a related pest, the Western Pine Beetle (WPB). Unlike the MPB which attack most species of pine, the WPB only attacks ponderosa pine.

The City's Pine Beetle Hotline (469-8457) has been utilized by concerned citizens, with an estimated 100 phone calls per year. Many residents are still interested in how they might prevent attack on their trees. Unfortunately, few options exist and none are guaranteed. Some methods such as "fiberglass screening" are showing promise but are still being tested. Given that high rates of tree mortality are expected, staff are advising the public that it would be wise to consider replanting trees now.

Funding Initiatives:

Through a partnership with the federal government under Strategic Partnership Funding (SPF) and a local fuel modification contractor, the City received approximately \$1.27 million in funding thru 2014, to assist with pine beetle control and fuel modification. The projects' main goal is to assist with pine beetle control and fuel modification on city properties. The fuel modification crews have already completed work at 29 pine beetle/fuel management sites (identified in a 2010 Community Wildfire Protection Plan), and planted 4933 seedling at 14 City properties.

Funding is also being applied for from the Province of British Columbia, through the Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM). Through this program, the UBCM will reimburse up to 90% of costs (up to \$100,000) and 75% of costs (\$100,001-\$400,000) for projects on municipal land that involve removal of beetle kill trees and fire hazard mitigation. In the most recent application (Spring, 2012), \$165,000 has been applied for. UBCM requires a resolution from council prior to approval. The City of Kelowna is responsible for overall grant management and support for the operational fuel treatment projects taking place.

Internal Circulation:

Lorna Gunn, Grants Manager
Fire Department

Financial/Budgetary Considerations:

No additional budget is required in 2012 to fulfill this year's program.

Considerations not applicable to this report:

Legal/Statutory Authority:

Legal/Statutory Procedural Requirements:

Existing Policy:

Personnel Implications:

External Agency/Public Comments:


Communications Comments:

Alternate Recommendation:

Submitted by: 

Blair Stewart, Urban Forestry Supervisor

Approved for inclusion:



Joe Creron, Director, Civic Operations

cc: Ian Wilson, Parks Services Manager
John Vos, General Manager of Community Services