Forest Service News Release

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Mistletoe Infestation Removal Project Begins at the
Trestle Recreation Area Just in Time for the Holidays

Alamogordo, NM, November 10, 2021 — The Trestle Recreation Area, near Cloudcroft, NM, is experiencing a mistletoe infestation. This isn't your fun Christmas mistletoe; it's a well-known tree-killing parasite called dwarf mistletoe common in southwest forests.

Beginning the week of November 15, 2021, the Sacramento Ranger District will begin a project to remove trees infected with dwarf mistletoe across 11 acres in and around the Trestle Recreation Area. The Trestle Recreation Area, also known as The Depot, will be closed this winter while crews work to remove the infected trees and stop the spread. The nearby trail network will remain open.

What is a Dwarf Mistletoe Infestation?

Most people have heard of mistletoe, usually in connection to holiday parties. Dwarf mistletoe, however, is a gold-colored parasitic plant that attacks conifers and steals the host trees' essential nutrients and water. There are eight species of dwarf mistletoe in the southwest, each typically preferring a specific type of host tree. Ponderosa pine dwarf mistletoe has long been recognized as one of the most damaging diseases of ponderosa pine in the southwest. Without intervention, it's likely all of the ponderosa pines at the recreation area would be dead within ten years.

Host branches and stems swell at the site of dwarf mistletoe infections. The stress results in a deformed mass of twigs and branches commonly referred to as a witch's broom. The infestation spreads across the tree and eventually moves to nearby trees. Removing the infected trees is the

best way to stop the spread of mistletoe to neighboring trees.

"Once a tree is infected with mistletoe, the health of the tree declines," said Forest Service Timber Staff Jessie Willett. "Smaller trees decline and die more quickly than larger ones. Tree mortality in areas with extensive infection is often three to four times higher than in uninfected areas."

To make matters worse, bark beetles frequently attack heavily infected trees, especially during drought.

Details of the Project

The Trestle Recreation area is a popular spot for forest visitors, and the effects of dwarf mistletoe in this area are particularly concerning. Dwarf Mistletoe-infected trees pose a hazard as they become weakened over time and fall. Mistletoe also diminishes the aesthetic and scenic values of the well-traversed trail network.

This fall and winter, expect crews and heavy equipment to be working in the area. The Forest Service collaborated with NM Forestry Division and the South-Central Mountain Resource Conversation and Development Council (SCM RC&D), who has graciously lent the Forest Service a unique piece of equipment called an Air Curtain Incinerator for the project.

"We are delighted to be able to partner with the Forest Service and support them in creating healthier forests in Otero and Lincoln counties," said Laura Doth, Coordinator for SCM RC&D.

An Air Curtain Incinerator is a mobile trailer designed for high-temperature burning of forest slash. It replaces the need for prescribed burning or chipping and is ideal for small projects or projects close to developed areas where prescribed burning isn't possible. The Air Curtain Incinerator burns slash created by the treatment with minimal smoke, and the leftover nutrient-dense ash can be added right back to the soil.

The last step of the project is to replant trees in the Trestle Recreation Area in the late summer of 2022.

"The hope is that we can stop the spread of the mistletoe in this area," Willett stated. "There is no doubt the Depot will look different after the project, but we want to make sure the area remains safe for visitors, and the remaining ponderosa pines are around future generations. Now is the time to act."

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