Commissioner Goldmark announces Forest Health Hazard Warning

Local News

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Olympia, WA - The Commissioner of Public Lands Peter Goldmark today proposed a “forest health hazard warning” under Washington State law in order to get a jump on deteriorating forest conditions. Citing concerns for catastrophic wildfire, the Commissioner took action to implement and expand recommendations from a nine-member technical advisory committee.The committee recommended that the Commissioner issue the hazard warning for eastern Okanogan and western Ferry counties based on concerns over an ongoing western spruce budworm infestation.Goldmark wants to go one step further.Unhealthy forests are contributing to the destructive fires we have seen in Colorado and across the west, today I am taking action to improve our forest health before it is too late. I am implementing the recommendation of a panel of experts and expanding the geographic scope of our hazard warning to more eastern Washington Counties. We must be careful stewards of our forests and take every reasonable measure to protect them from forest health threats. - Commissioner of Public Lands Peter Goldmark

Goldmark is proposing to declare a formal warning designation in areas the committee considered a threat, but did not ultimately recommend a warning. Specifically, they include:§ Expanding the spruce budworm warning area to include all of Ferry County;§ Including pine bark beetles as the subject of the warnings in Okanogan & Ferry counties; and§ Issuing an additional warning for pine bark beetles in portions of Klickitat and Yakima counties.“I am ordering the allocation of $4.3 million from the Jobs Bill, provided through the foresight and leadership of the legislature, to offer assistance and fund additional projects that will help address the threat,” Goldmark said.The budworm eats new foliage from Douglas-fir and other fir tree species. The damage can kill trees outright if the infestation lasts several years or can weaken them enough that they succumb to other insects or diseases. The committee found that forest conditions are conducive for the outbreak to be large and damaging.About 40 percent of the proposed warnings in Okanogan and Ferry counties are managed by the US Forest Service; and the legislature provided a limited amount of funds to contribute toward federal land projects in the event a warning was designated. Early discussions with local national forest leaders have already identified four federal land projects that could potentially be accelerated or enhanced, Goldmark said.“I am committed to working in the spirit of cooperation, because all land managers need to be pulling together toward good solutions,” said Goldmark, “Bugs have no respect for property boundaries.”**Forest Health Hazard Order**Last November, Goldmark initiated the state’s forest health warning system and convened the technical panel in January. The action was in response to persistently worsening tree damage in eastern Washington: the acres of trees that have been killed or damaged by forest insects and diseases over the past decade is 150 percent greater than in the 1990s, 200 percent greater than in the 1980s, and 175 percent greater than in the 1970s.The effect of a warning designation is to call attention to an emerging forest health issue and focus actions and resources on addressing it. All actions are voluntary on the part of the affected landowners and land managers. Funding allocated to DNR, under a “Jobs Bill” passed by the state legislature in April, will be directed toward the effort.**Next Steps**State law requires that public hearings be held in the affected areas prior to final

action by the Commissioner. DNR is planning for these to take place next week. Consultative discussions with local governments, tribes, agency and private forest managers, as well as other interested parties, are also required and will be ongoing.