



COMPLAINT INVESTIGATION SUMMARY

Management of a Spruce Beetle Infestation near Prince George



What is this complaint about?

Since 2014, a spruce beetle infestation in the Omineca region has killed tens of millions of spruce trees. Government declared an outbreak in 2015.

In 2021, the Board received a complaint that BCTS and a licensee in the Prince George Forest District are not harvesting the most severely infested areas, which may jeopardize future timber supply. The complainant is also concerned that government is not monitoring or reporting to the public on the licensees' spruce beetle harvesting, which limits the ability of the public to understand how government and licensees are responding to the outbreak.

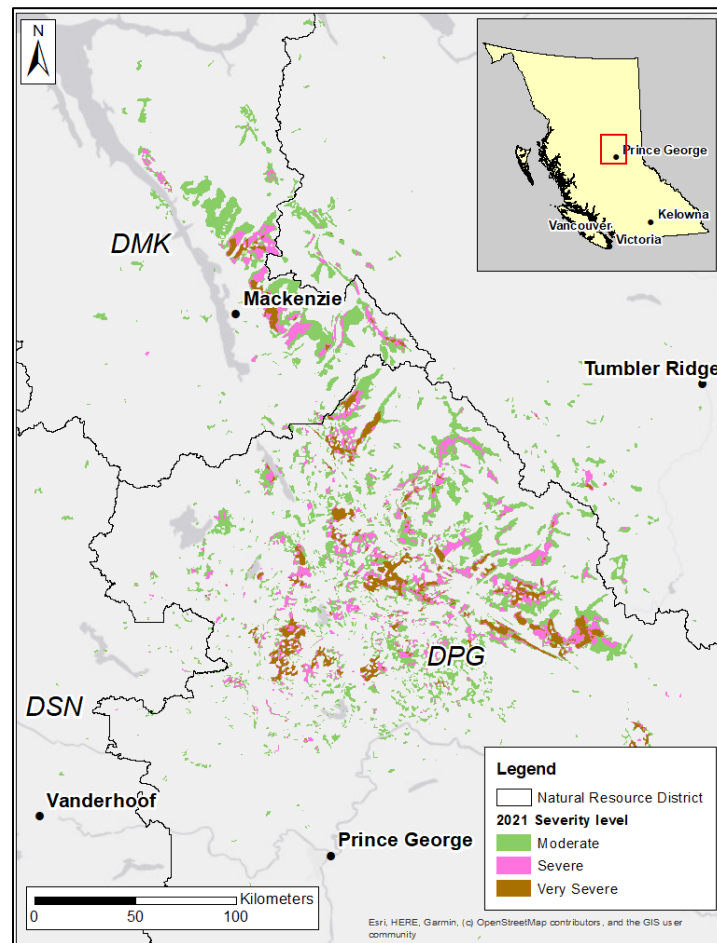
Spruce beetles occur in patches dotted across the landscape, rather than being concentrated in a specific area. Spruce beetles spread slowly, compared to the mountain pine beetle, and do not necessarily kill all spruce trees in an infested area. It's also more difficult to spot an infestation because the trees do not change colour for one to two years after the trees are attacked.

The spruce beetle outbreak and harvest of dead spruce trees may impact biodiversity, carbon storage, economic, and wildlife habitat values.

What did the Board investigate?

The Board must deal with complaints from the public about compliance with the *Forest and Range Practices Act* (FRPA). In this investigation, the Board looked at whether:

1. Licensees complied with *Forest and Range Practices Act* (FRPA) requirements;
2. Government has been monitoring licensees' activities to determine if they are meeting government's expectations; and
3. Licensees' activities are consistent with government's expectations.



What did we find?

Choosing the appropriate response to the outbreak is challenging for the forest industry and government. In light of the scale of the infestation, the need to protect Indigenous Peoples' interests, higher-level plan requirements, economics, harvesting capacity, and other forest values (such as endangered species habitat and biodiversity), many of the infested areas will never be harvested by BCTS or licensees.

It is clear to the Board that licensees are making progress in harvesting infested and dead spruce trees. The ministry has hosted annual bark beetle summits to provide Indigenous and local governments, forest professionals, and stakeholders with information on the outbreak. However, the investigation found that the ministry has neither systematically monitored nor publicly reported whether the forest industry is meeting government expectations.

We conclude that:

1. To date, government has not used any FRPA tools to direct licensees on how they should respond to the infestation. Instead, government has provided licensees with its expectations and guidance for managing the outbreak.
2. Government has done some preliminary work, but has not systematically monitored or reported on whether licensees' spruce beetle harvesting aligns with government expectations.
3. Licensees have been addressing government expectations in their planning, but we cannot tell if their actual harvest performance has been consistent with the expectations.

The Board is recommending that the ministry monitor BCTS's and licensees' performance to determine whether they are meeting government expectations and implementing the beetle action plans, and report annually to the public.

This would allow the ministry and the public to better understand the response to the impacts of the spruce beetle outbreak.

See the full investigation report on the Board's website at: <https://www.bcfpb.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/IRC245-PG-Spruce-Beetle-Mgmt.pdf>