

Chamberlain, Anne

From: Paul Schlein
Sent: Friday, December 09, 2016 12:58 PM
To: Pesticides
Cc: Struble, Dave; Donahue, Charlene; Grodan@maine.edu; Jennings, Henry; Chamberlain, Anne
Subject: Board Meeting Agenda Submission

Dear Board of Pesticides Control,

Please add this to the agenda for next Friday's Board meeting.

It has come to my attention that the Maine Forest Service is looking to fund a \$50,000 grant for research at the University of Maine on alternatives for the control of browntail moth. Details would need to come from the MFS and UMaine, but, as I see you are actively discussing the browntail moth issue at this very moment, with items on next week's agenda, this seems like the perfect time to bring this to your attention. Funding this urgently needed research would seem to also be a perfect fit in the Board's mission to reduce reliance on pesticides.

I think the word "urgent" may not be strong enough, as I have just read in this week's *Forecaster* (<http://www.theforecaster.net/brunswick-residents-prepare-to-take-on-browntail-moths/>) that the current estimate of 64,000 infested acres is a conservative one, and that next season's coverage is expected to expand to a far greater range.

Thank you for your timely consideration of this issue.

Sincerely,
Paul

P.S. I am copying the MFS and UMaine with this message, in the event they would like to send any additional information by next Tuesday, 12/13, 8:00 AM, to be included with the Board packet (<http://www.maine.gov/dacf/php/pesticides/meetings.shtml#policy>).

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the FORECASTER

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Brunswick residents prepare to take on browntail moths

By [Callie Ferguson](#) on December 7, 2016 [@calliecferguson](#)

BRUNSWICK — A group of about a dozen residents have launched a grassroots education campaign on ways to stymie an anticipated infestation of browntail moths.

It follows a recent survey that projected the spring population of moths might balloon to three times the size of last summer's outbreak.

While the group is focused on community outreach, member Kathy McLeod said the mission "could evolve into pressure being put on the state" – although state officials have indicated they're unlikely to supply any direct funding to municipalities.

The Browntail Action Group formed and has met at least three times since an October event at Curtis Memorial library, where a panel of experts shared methods to proactively decrease the number of spawning caterpillars next year.

The library event drew close to 200 people, signaling wide public interest after an outbreak left some residents with painful rashes and damaged trees.

State forest entomologist Charlene Donahue sat on the panel, and, in a phone call Monday, she said the last infestation on that scale was likely 100 years ago.

The most recent statewide outbreak of moths took place in 2003, and defoliated 10,000 acres of trees.

This past summer's infestation, however, spread across 25,000 acres – and next summer, she said, could be almost three times as large.

Citing a recent aerial survey, Donahue said at least 64,000 acres of trees are implicated, identifiable by their brown leaves. But that's a conservative estimate, she added, given that not all infected leaves turn brown; she plans to conduct another survey this month.

After the library panel, Action Group founder Esther Mechler stood up and collected the names of those who might be interested in forming a group to combat the issue at a local level. This week, they will post 2,000 fliers around town with information about what residents can do now to reduce caterpillar populations in the spring.

“Now is the time to prune out any nests you can reach,” the flier reads. “By removing and destroying just 10 of these nests, you could prevent as many as 4,000 new caterpillars from hatching out this spring.”

Residents can destroy nests by dunking them in soapy water or burning them, according to the group.

Mechler said the next Action Group meeting will take place Dec. 20 at Town Hall.

Town Council Chairwoman Sarah Brayman said this sort of grassroots effort is an important supplement to actions taken by the town because the group has “the ability to reach out into the community and talk to people.”

“I think potentially this could be a huge issue for the town,” Brayman said. “(The council doesn’t) have the resources, time and money to get out into the community in the manner that might be needed for this.”

Neighbor-to-neighbor outreach especially matters with this issue, she said, because the failure to coordinate prevention efforts could undermine the success of those who do undertake them. Because the caterpillar’s toxic hairs travel in the wind, a stiff breeze is all it takes for airborne hairs from a neighbor’s infected tree to undo the work on trees that were treated next door.

“You really need a public or community effort,” Brayman emphasized.

Town Manager John Eldridge said he plans to meet with colleagues in Sagadahoc County later this month to discuss coordinated efforts to combat the issue, such as joint-purchasing chemicals to spray trees. According to information provided by the action group, there are a variety of chemical and bacterial pesticides that arborists use to inject or spray trees to kill moths.

Brayman believes that state action is warranted, given the scale of the problem.

“I think it’s a public health issue and potentially an environmental disaster and I believe the state could be involved,” Brayman said Monday.

However, state entomologist Dave Struble said Wednesday morning that he doubts the Maine Forest Service would provide direct funds to assist municipalities.

“I see state money to help oversee the operation,” he said, meaning that state aid would come in the form of oversight, not funding. “You’ve watched the elections over the last few years and you tell me. There’s not a lot of resources.”

As far as what the Forest Service can do, “the state’s involvement was always in (developing prevention methods), and our technical assistance to the town was helping them run their projects,” Struble said, referring to the work Donahue is already doing.

Struble recommended that the towns approach the Bureau of Health or the Maine Center for Disease Control for direct aid.

Donahue said the issue “is high on our response list” in that regard, and she is communicating with agencies across the state to prepare for next spring.

Later this month, she will meet with arborists and pesticide applicators to discuss best practices. She is also in touch with the state pesticide board of control to make sure that state legislation is up to date with contemporary practices and chemical agents.

However, McLeod worried that pesticide applicators are overwhelmed; the local service she uses isn’t taking on new customers after last summer’s outbreak.

“We may be constrained by who’s available to do the work with the equipment,” Struble said, echoing McLeod. “That’s not a cheering piece of news, but that’s reality.”

Even if the manpower is available, Struble said pesticides, while an effective way to combat browntail moths, can be a contentious issue because of the environmental impact. He said biological, bacteria-based spray exists, but there is “no silver bullet” that has yet to balance environmental impact with efficacy.

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or cferguson@theforecaster.net. Follow Callie on
Twitter: [@calliecferguson](https://twitter.com/calliecferguson).**



Browntail moth nests like the one shown here can be clipped from trees in early winter to prevent the caterpillars from spawning in the early spring.



Reporter on the Brunswick/Harpswell beat. Proud Bowdoin grad that you can find reporting on municipal, school, and community news, or inside the many coffee and sandwich shops around the Midcoast. Callie can be reached at 207-781-3661 ext. 100.