



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Jewel Cave
National Monument

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Jewel Cave National Monument News Release

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Jewel Cave Fights Pine Beetle Impacts

Custer, SD - For the second straight year, Jewel Cave National Monument had to cut down some ponderosa pine trees that were heavily damaged by the mountain pine beetle. Monument staff felled the 67 trees last month and cut them into 18-inch chunks. The chunks will be rolled in late May or early June to ensure that the wood dries completely and kills the beetle larvae.

The Black Hills region has witnessed an increase in beetle killed trees over the past few years, with the affected species being primarily ponderosa pine. While the beetles are native to the Black Hills ecosystem, unhealthy forest systems have contributed to a higher than normal beetle population. These conditions have led to the local epidemic on many public and private lands. This continues to increase the number of dead or dying trees in the region. If dry conditions persist into the summer months, a dangerous fire risk is also possible for the Black Hills.

“Due to the magnitude of the impacts, Jewel Cave is trying to be proactive, not reactive, with its management efforts,” Superintendent Larry Johnson states. “Last year, over 90 trees were cut down and dried successfully within the Monument. This past winter, a follow-up survey located 67 additional trees, and we took the required actions in order to control further impacts. This continued effort will hopefully suppress beetles from moving into new areas. We will assess the situation again this next winter and take the appropriate actions in 2013.”

The Jasper Fire in August 2000 burned around 95 percent of the trees at Jewel Cave. The negative impact of course was that the fire consumed much of the ponderosa pine forest and temporarily altered the landscape. The positive aspect is that the remaining trees are well scattered and spaced, which ultimately created a healthier ecosystem for remaining and incoming trees. Although pine beetles are present at the Monument, the area has not seen the damage of other public and private land sites within the Black Hills. Johnson further states, “Ironically, due to the Jasper Fire, we have been fortunate to have a smaller number of trees infested with pine beetles than other areas of the Black Hills. We’d like to protect the trees we have left, ensuring any impacts are minimized and don’t carry over to our neighbors’ property.”

Jewel Cave uses prescribed fire as another way to manage its forests. However, in recent years, fire has been used mainly as a way to reduce forest litter and consume debris left behind by the Jasper Fire. And, areas impacted by such a hot fire as the Jasper Fire often experience an increase in invasive weeds, such as Canada thistle. This has been the case at the Monument, and fire has been used to mitigate further spreading of the noxious species. Johnson continues, “The National Park Service mission is to preserve the resources we’ve been entrusted with for future

Over

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generations, while providing for public use. By monitoring what's happening with the resources and taking action to mitigate unnatural impacts, we are optimistic that our management techniques will see positive outcomes and balance with the actions and expectations of our surrounding neighbors and agency partners.”

For more information related to Jewel Cave National Monument, contact the Visitor Center at (605) 673-8300 and select Option #2. The Monument can also be visited online at www.nps.gov/jeca.

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