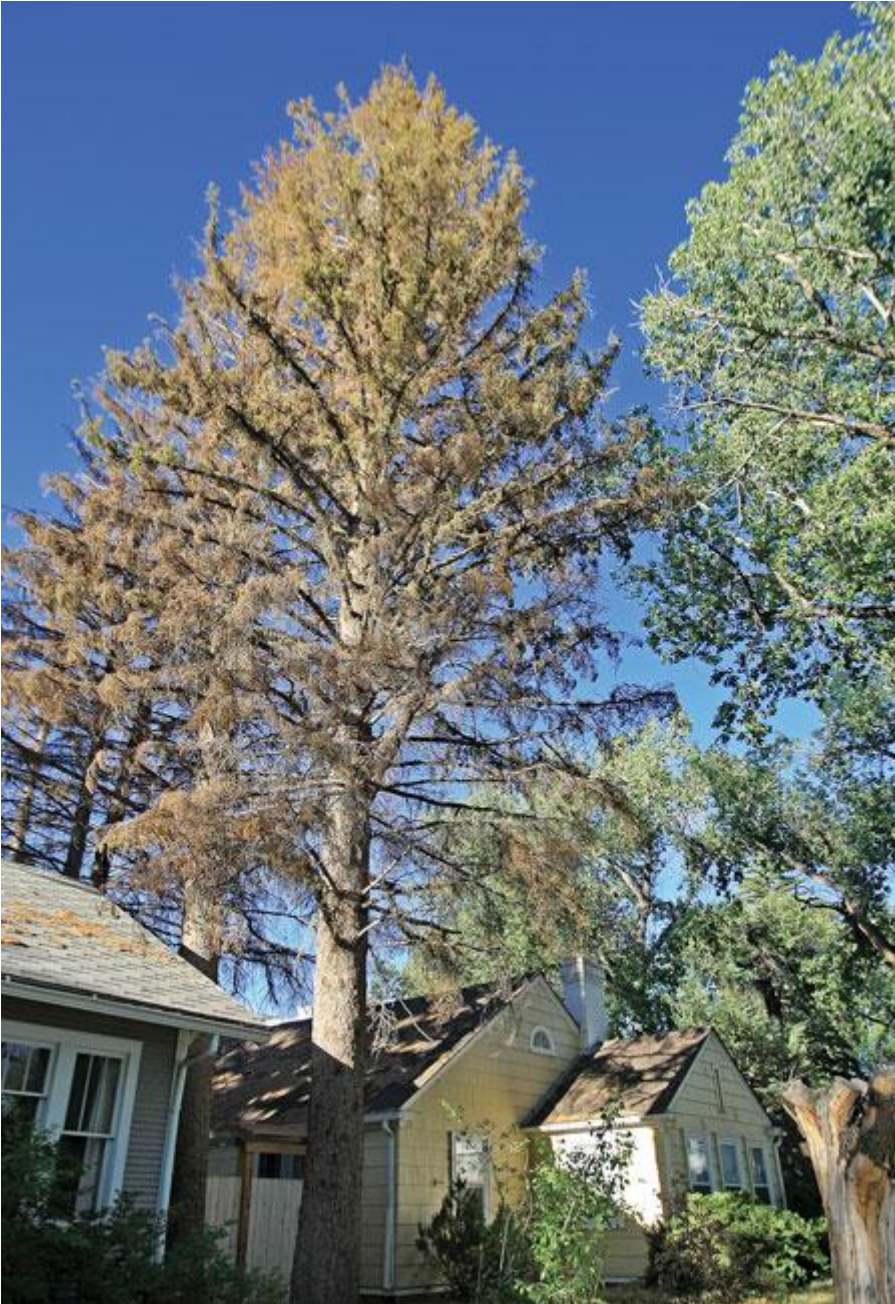


Bark beetle blues

Blue spruce killed by mountain pine beetle in Laramie cemetery BY CARRIE HADERLIE /

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This bark beetle-infested tree is one of several in a residential area at 15th and Garfield. Andy Carpenean/Boomerang photographer

Mountain pine beetles have killed a mature Colorado blue spruce tree previously located in Green Hill Cemetery, and that tree is the first known case of mountain pine beetle infestation in a blue spruce statewide according to the city.

“What that means is that there is enough mountain pine beetles in the urban forest in Laramie that the beetles are not only feeding on pines, but they are going to attack and infest large Colorado blue spruce, which is not their host source of food,” Paul Harrison, city director of parks and recreation, said. “Once they do that, it puts all of the mature Colorado blue spruce at risk,” including private homeowners’ blue spruce trees, he said.

Predictions are that 80-90 percent of the mature lodgepole pine will die off because of the mountain pine beetle epidemic

in the Medicine Bow National Forest, Harrison said.

Laramie's urban needle-bearing forest includes 175 lodgepole pines and over 1,500 Colorado blue spruce.

The lodgepole pines have been sprayed for the past three years but the city only began spraying blue spruce this year.

"Imagine 80-90 percent of the (Colorado blue spruce) dying off. That would be devastating. It would just be a significant loss to the city's forest," Harrison said. "We need to notify the public."

Because there are three predominant types of beetle infestations in this area — the mountain pine beetle; a spruce beetle, which primarily feed on Colorado blue spruce; and the Ips beetle, which also primarily feeds on blue spruce — the previous assumption was that spruce trees were safe from mountain pine beetle infestation, even if they were only feet from an infected pine.

"Not any longer," Harrison said.

Harrison said mature Colorado blue spruce trees have bark that is similar to lodgepole pine bark.

"The bark on a Colorado blue spruce is typically not nearly as thick or as craggy and doesn't have as many cracks and crevices as a pine. So the large spruce have that thick bark, and that is what we think they are attacking. The beetles are not probably going to attack the small spruce, just the very large ones," Harrison said. "It is, frankly, scary what it could do to the spruce in Laramie."

The tree in Green Hill Cemetery has been removed.

The process to protect or to mitigate infected trees is the same for a Colorado blue spruce and lodgepole pine.

For more information on how to protect your trees, visit the city's bark beetle mitigation plan at www.cityoflaramie.com and search for "beetle" or go to <http://www.ci.laramie.wy.us/park&rec/documents/barkbeetlebrochure.pdf>, or call 721-5220.