

Foresters eye stepped-up Gypsy moth programs

SCRANTON — One of the most destructive insects to ever invade the forests of the Northeastern United States will be on the defensive for the first time this year.

The leaf-eating gypsy moth will be "on the run" because of a wide range of state and U.S. Department of Agriculture action programs designed to keep down the damage and nuisance this pest can cause.

"Gypsy moths are the most destructive hardwood tree defoliator in the Northeast," said Stanley McNally, area director of the department's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, "but with all the research and field experience gained over the years, we are finally learning to deal with it."

Gypsy moth caterpillars stripped almost 650,000 acres of forests in 1979, principally in the northeastern states. USDA's Forest Service

predicts this year's defoliation will be down to about 270,000 acres.

Even so, in hard hit areas trees may be weakened or even killed, creating fire hazards and destroying bird and animal habitats, McNally said. Gypsy moths can be a nuisance to homeowners and spoil the appeal of outdoor recreation areas.

"In our program against the gypsy moth," McNally said, "we first try to keep down damage in the generally infested area and second, prevent artificial, people-caused spread to new areas. If isolated outbreaks do occur, they are wiped out."

Environmental impacts are reviewed in advance by the department and the Environmental Protection Agency.

"Every option is considered and public input solicited," McNally said.

"We conduct spray

programs in the Northeast to reduce damage and nuisance caused by the moth in the generally infested area," McNally said. "State agencies survey to determine where defoliation by the moth will be heaviest the following year. Local communities then decide if they want a treatment program. If they do, the operation is coordinated at the federal level by USDA's Forest Service."

Both chemical and biological insecticides are used, he said. Most are applied in late May or early June. About 143,000 acres in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New York are scheduled for these treatments in 1980.

APHIS is in charge of regulatory treatments at heavily infested campgrounds, McNally said. "It's likely gypsy moths will be spread to new areas from these campgrounds," he said.

Chemical insecticides will be used on 15,656 acres in campgrounds in Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island and Vermont, McNally said.

Isolated infestations have already been found this year in Illinois, Ohio, Virginia and Michigan and will be dealt with in cooperative state-APHIS programs.

Isolated infestations occur when moth eggs or other life stages hitchhike to new areas with people or in commerce, McNally said.

This happens fairly often because the female moth may lay her eggs on vehicles, camping gear, lawn furniture or almost anything else out-of-doors," he said.

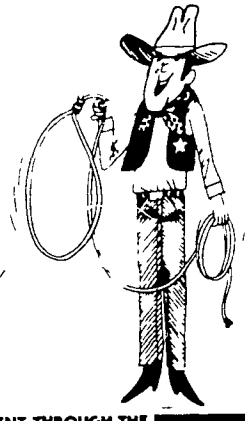
"The best tool to use against an outlying infestation depends on the nature and size of the area, its environmental sensitivity, the intensity of the outbreak and the likelihood of spread to other areas," McNally said. "We also take into account the desires of local residents and landowners."

High-density trapping uses cardboard traps baited with a chemical that mimics the female moth's pheromone—sex attractant. When many of the traps are placed in an area, they either capture or confuse the males looking for a female moth and mating does not occur.

In the sterile-male technique, male gypsy moth pupae are sexually sterilized with precise doses of radiation and released as adults to mate with native female moths. Eggs that are laid will not hatch.

To find isolated infestations while they are still small enough to be eliminated, federal, state and volunteer workers set thousands of pheromone-baited traps all over the country, McNally said.

"In 1979, the trapping turned up moths in Nebraska and Oregon for the first time, along with repeat finds in 16 other states outside generally infested area in Pennsylvania, New England, New York, and New Jersey. Plant protection officials will closely monitor those sites this year to determine the catches are new infestations or merely lone hitchhikers."



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