

Environment Report – July 2012

Right now in June, as this report is being written, the focus is surely on wildfires. The smoke from the High Park wildfire is visible from many areas in The Retreat. The intensity and size of this wildfire should make us all stop and think about our properties. Are we being “Firewise” and doing our best to make our homes as safe as they can be? The CSU website has a great deal of “Firewise” information. Try www.cmg.colostate.edu/pubs and search for Firewise. There are publications for types of construction, plants, desired distance between trees and the distance to structures, as well as many others, and all are “Firewise”. There are also links to other organizations for additional “Firewise” info. Be vigilant and be safe.

The past winter was mild and dry with lots of wind. The lack of moisture and of wind really cause the vegetation and trees to become dry. Normally at this time of year, our trees have 70% to 90% moisture. This year, the moisture in our trees is about 10% to 20% and much lower in the areas of wildfire. This dryness makes the trees less healthy and more subject to insects, diseases and possibly death of trees. Many trees are browning from the top down and are probably on their way out.

The erratic winter and spring weather also diminished our usual nice show of wildflowers. It seems that we lost the whole spring.

Insects love the warm dry winters. Grasshoppers are plentiful right now, as are western tent caterpillars, aphids and many other destructive insects. However, I have never seen this many swallowtail butterflies in this area before.

Trees are also taking a hit from insects and disease. The Douglas fir beetle and the Douglas fir pole beetle are killing some big and mid-size Douglas fir. These beetles fly earlier than the Mountain Pine Beetle. The MPB usually fly mid-July to late August and sometimes into September. Some fly a little earlier, maybe late May and early June. Because people are so aware of the damage caused by MPB, mistaken reports of early MPB are actually other similar-looking beetles. Forest Service people, who watch the development of the MPB larvae, indicate that flight is on schedule for about mid July.

Let’s hope for more rain, less wind and nice weather for the remainder of this summer.

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