



What Can We Do About The Spongy Moth Outbreak?

By: Ryan Reed, Natural Resource Program Specialist, Bureau of Forestry

DCNR - There is no doubt that 2022 is an outbreak year for spongy moths (formerly known as gypsy moths), whose voracious caterpillars have stripped the leaf canopy in many areas of the state.

Spongy moths are known to target oaks, and many stands of oak have been hit hard in the state.

If you've noticed some barren mountaintops that seem to resemble more of a winter landscape than summer, unfortunately you are not alone. This is the unfortunate result of spongy moths.

When a tree is stripped of its leaves, it is known as defoliation. This weakens the tree as it uses up valuable resources to regrow leaves. It is important to note that it's too early to tell if a recently defoliated tree from spongy moth will die.

It usually takes more than one defoliation event to kill a tree; however, a tree that was previously weakened by other factors could die from spongy moth defoliation.

Thankfully, defoliation from spongy moths this year is ending, as the caterpillar stage of development is nearly complete.

The best time to plan for spongy moth treatment is not while the damage is actively occurring.

Successful treatment begins long in advance with egg mass surveying and planning during the preceding year.

Female spongy moths lay their eggs as light tan egg masses on trees, stones, and other flat sheltered areas during June and July.

Egg masses can range from the size of a quarter (200-250 eggs) to two to three inches long (more than 1,000 eggs).

Spongy moth eggs hatch from mid-April to early May the following spring.

You should survey your property for these egg masses in late summer and fall.

DCNR's website provides information for removal of egg masses from individual yards and trees.

However, for larger forested properties, when egg mass surveys reveal that the spongy moth population has exceeded a certain threshold, aerial treatment is recommended for the following spring.

PennState Extension offers a Guide to Spongy Moth Egg Mass Surveying Opens In A New Window that can help you make a plan for your property. DCNR service foresters also can visit your property to provide information and advice.

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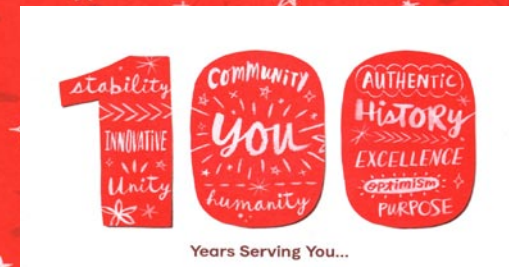
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