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August, 1986

Squirrel Damage to Young Lodgepole Pine in the Southern Yukon

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Forest Insect and Disease Survey

Cone stripping by squirrels resulted in the death of leaders and upper crown branches on young lodgepole pine between Watson Lake and Jakes Corner and north of Johnson's Crossing in the southern Yukon. Near Jakes Corner (Km 1360 Alaska Highway), 40% of the leaders were dying over approximately 10 ha in a 40-year-old lodgepole pine stand. Less severely damaged pine were scattered throughout the surrounding stand. East of Swift River (at Km 1120), approximately 10% of leaders and branch terminals were affected. The number of trees affected in the southern Yukon is estimated to be in the tens of thousands.

Samples showed that mature cones had been ripped off at three or four locations around the stem near the apex of the 1984 shoot, leaving deep scars approximately 1 cm long by .5 cm wide. The apparent freshness of the wounds in early July indicates that the damage occurred in early spring rather than in the fall when squirrels normally gather cones. Although the wounds did not always girdle the stems, desiccation contributed to top-kill.

This type of damage has not previously been reported to this extent in the Yukon or northern British Columbia.

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Squirrel damage to young lodgepole pine in the southern Yukon Territory determined by roadside surveys, July 1986.

Approximate area of young lodgepole pine stands with damaged leaders and laterals, caused by squirrels stripping mature cones.

Scale: 1 cm = 25 km
(1:2 500 000)

Forest Insect and Disease Survey

