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ASPEN DEFOLIATORS IN THE DAWSON CREEK FOREST DISTRICT

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Three aspen defoliators, forest tent caterpillar, *Malacosoma pluviale*, large aspen tortrix, *Choristoneura conflictana* and a as yet unidentified leafroller infested mature and immature aspen throughout the Dawson Creek Forest District.

The infestations are widely scattered and often in conjunction with each other in small patches throughout the host range. The most visible infestation is that of the forest tent caterpillar which has severely defoliated aspen south of Taylor over more than 2700 hectares.

The large aspen tortrix was noted in several patches totalling 2500 ha around the Farmington area but also at low levels in many aspen stands infesting the same trees as the tent caterpillar. Determining the causal insect is difficult without close inspection. The white cotton like balls obvious in the tops of aspen are typical of the forest tent caterpillar while rolled leaves are indicative of the tortrix. Both of these defoliators have finished feeding and begun to pupate by end of June.

The leafroller is abundant in mature and immature aspen throughout the Dawson Creek area, although the damage is not as apparent as with the tortrix or tent caterpillar. The leafroller rolls the leaves into tubes and then begins feeding within the rolled leaf. Aspen stands and especially the tops of trees look thin and ragged in areas with heavy populations.

While these defoliators seldom kill trees the additional stress makes them more susceptible to attack from other insects and disease. Local residents and forest industry officials have expressed concerns relating to the defoliation of aspen throughout northern British Columbia. With the increased use of aspen, sustainability of the resource has become a concern in recent years.

For further information on these or other pests please phone the Forest Insect and Disease Survey at 363-0600.
