

Outlook on Lifestyle

Forest infestation

Return of the caterpillars

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Like a scene from a horror movie, people in parts of Ontario are expected this spring and summer to moan "They're baaack!"

Provincial and federal insect specialists predict forest caterpillars will return in some areas this year in ever-greater numbers as the omnipresent insects work their bothersome way through their three-to-five-year cycle of growth and decline.

Although not life-threatening to the hardwood trees they thrive in, forest caterpillars pose a threat to the comfort level of residents and cottagers forced to gingerly weave their way through cluttered masses of the highly squishable insects.

That manoeuvring will continue for about two months from April when the larvae hatch, to late May and early June when forest caterpillars begin forming cocoons. They emerge as moths in July and lay their eggs shortly afterward.

In 1988, approximately four million hectares of forest were infested with forest caterpillars, resulting in moderate to severe defoliation. That area is expected to increase in 1989, to between eight and nine million hectares, says Gordon Howse, head of the forest insect and disease survey unit of the Canadian Forestry Service.

Most of that increased infestation is expected to occur east of the Parry Sound/Bracebridge area and expand throughout Haliburton and the Kawartha toward the Ottawa area, says Joe Churcher, provincial entomologist with the Ministry of Natural Resources.

Part of that Parry Sound/Bracebridge infestation, says Churcher, will be a band of forest caterpillar infestation this year stretching from just north of Sault Ste. Marie, across the North Channel to Sudbury and North Bay and continuing down into Algonquin Park.

"It's probably all going to amalgamate into one big, huge area of defoliation," says Churcher.

He adds that by 1990, people can expect a reduction in defoliation in these areas as caterpillars near the end of their cycle. The length of the cycle depends on parasites, diseases and weather conditions.

Entomologists also expect a buildup of infestation in the Owen Sound area, continuing in a narrow band through Collingwood to Barrie.

Defoliation in parts of northeastern Ontario, including the Temagami and Kirkland Lake areas, declined in 1988 and, having "pretty well run its course," is expected to decline further in 1989, says Churcher.

Forest caterpillar infestations in the Fort Frances, Dryden, Ignace, and Kenora areas that are now in their second or third year are ex-

pected to continue this year, but taper off next year, says Churcher.

However, noting the difficulty in accurately predicting infestations, Howse has a different view. He says northwestern Ontario is still in the building phase, with the Thunder Bay, Dryden, and Fort Frances areas holding the greatest potential for further buildup.

In eastern Ontario, Trenton, Belleville, and Cornwall will begin to see some forest caterpillar infestations this summer, or in 1990. Continued infestations of another species, the Eastern Tent Caterpillar (identifiable by the tent-like cocoon they form on fruit trees), can be expected this year.

No high populations of forest caterpillars have surfaced in southwestern Ontario and nothing in the Niagara Region, say the entomologists.

The Ministry of Natural Resources considers forest caterpillar infestations, which take place once every 10 to 12 years, a natural occurrence and not destructive enough to warrant a spraying program, Churcher says. Nonetheless, the ministry is con-

ducting a public information program to help people deal with the insect.

Although some preventive measures can be taken, there is a limit to what cottagers and residents can do to combat forest caterpillar infestations, says Churcher.

During winter months, forest caterpillars are in an egg state clustered in black rings around tree twigs. These twigs can be cut off and burned, suggests Howse.

But once the eggs have hatched - about the middle of April - and small, black caterpillars emerge, Churcher says the only control is spraying them with approved chemical or biological insecticides.

The most effective time to spray, agree Churcher and Howse, is May, when the caterpillars begin their ravenous quest for food and are most vulnerable.

Residents and cottagers in infested areas who don't act against the forest caterpillar will just have to get used to sharing their property until the infestation cycle works its way out.

Dangerous goods trains won't likely pass through

Trains carrying dangerous goods will likely not be re-routed through Halton Hills, as citizens feared last year.

The Toronto Area Rail Transportation of Dangerous Goods Task Force, which originally named a path through Halton Hills as one possible route, has said in its final report that "risk is not a justification, on its own, for the relocation of rail lines and/or re-routing of dangerous goods."

Early last year, the task force examined different rail routes in Southern Ontario as a means of re-routing dangerous goods away from the highly populated Metropolitan Toronto area. Any path through Halton would have increased risk levels by 25 to 30 per cent, said Halton's planning commissioner Rash Mohammed.

Relocating or construction of new lines would cost the province over \$1 billion.

The report concluded the existing rail transportation system is "generally safe," that numerous measures, including reducing speed through highly populated areas, could be implemented to make significant improvements to rail safety, and that any re-routing should only be considered if the entire rail system in the Greater Toronto Area is "rationalized."

Halton had argued strenuously that no path through the Region be earmarked for transportation of dangerous goods by rail.

Halton now wants the province to establish a similar task force to study transportation of dangerous goods by truck - a problem the Region sees as much more serious.

"Unlike rail transportation, which occurs largely in a controlled environment, truck movements face more conflicts in the form of weather conditions, other road users and potential for accidents. In addition, these movements can occur directly in residential areas and are, in many cases, more frequent," said Mr. Mohammed.

Burlington Coun. Robert Forbes supports the final recommendations of the task force "even though it's a not-in-my-back-yard syndrome."

"It's inappropriate for us to be a travelling dumping ground for hazardous waste," he said.

Burlington Coun. Barry Quinn agreed with the conclusion that trucks carrying dangerous goods pose a more significant risk. "Trucks carrying dangerous goods can travel into residential areas freely right now," he said.

And trucks are continuing to bypass weigh stations designed to govern their loads, he said.

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