Questioning economic benefit of harvesting beetle-infested trees

By Science Daily

A recently published study by U.S. Forest Service researchers evaluates potential revenues from harvesting standing timber killed by mountain pine beetle in the Western United States.

The study shows that while positive net revenues could be produced in West Coast and Northern Rockies states with active timber markets, the central Rocky Mountain states of Colorado, Utah, and Wyoming – which have the largest volume of standing dead timber – would not generate positive net revenues by salvaging beetle-killed timber.

A mountain pine beetle epidemic in the Western United States has left mountainsides covered with dead pines, especially lodgepole pine, with most of the timber and land affected on national forests.

Policymakers and forest managers are considering increasing timber salvage rates on these lands as a way to address potential wildfire threat, hazards from falling trees, and visual impact, but first need to assess the broader economic ramifications of putting more timber on the market in areas where mills have closed and markets have waned over the two last decades.

Research Forester Jeff Prestemon and fellow scientists with the Forest Service Southern Research Station Forest Economics and Policy unit and with the Eastern Forest Environmental Threat Assessment Center were asked to evaluate the circumstances under which salvaging pine beetle-killed timber would be cost-effective. The researchers used an economic

assessment model to estimate potential salvage volumes, costs and revenues from programs that would encourage salvage of standing dead timber, summarizing findings by state and owner groups.

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