

# NEWS UPDATE

USDA Forest Service

## Eldorado National Forest

100 Forni Road, Placerville, CA 95667



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### Lovers Leap Campground Update

#### **1.) Is the entire facility closed?**

No, only overnight camping, campfires, and parking have been restricted for public safety. The hiking trail to the rock is open. The routes are open except the ones affected by the Falcon closure.

#### **2.) When will the campground open up?**

The contract for removing the down trees is estimated at 14 days. The contract started on August 3, 2004. Due to extreme fire restrictions they can only use their equipment until 1p.m. which may extend the project a few days despite their best efforts. The bathrooms and water system are open. For your safety, please avoid the camping sites and follow the flagging at the gate the trail to the rock.

#### **3.) Where are other places to camp?**

All other forest campgrounds are open. Refer to campground information.

#### **4.) Where can we park?**

The gate is closed. Please temporarily park in the residential area (without blocking private driveways or parking on vegetation) or utilize other climbing areas until campground open back up.

#### **5.) Why has it taken since early June to have the trees removed?**

This was due to a combination of factors; the contracting process and the availability of the contractor. A contract must be developed, written, made available for bidders for a minimum length of time, the bids analyzed, and the contract awarded. The successful contractor must then with short notice rearrange their program of work to accomadate the project.

## 6.) Why were the trees cut?

In late May the dead and dying trees representing an unacceptable risk to campers and hikers using the area were marked and felled. The Forest Service made the decision to postpone opening the campground until the hazards could be removed.

**Situation** – The timber stand in the Lovers Leap Campground is primarily a two layered stand, with a scattered overstory of large Jeffrey Pines, incense cedar, and true fir. The understory primarily consists of pole sized white fir. Fire scars on many old growth trees in the area, and the relative even aged white fir understory, 70 to 80 years, indicates a stand replacing wildfire had occurred in the early 1900s, and over time regeneration was limited to white fir. Similar conditions were noted on both sides of the American River Canyon. Soils in the vicinity are granitic and relatively shallow as indicated by the numerous rock outcrops. Prior to the current and ongoing mortality event the white fir understory was a closed canopy stand, estimated to be well above the maximum stand density associated with a high risk of drought related mortality as a result of even minor reductions in available soil water.

The current white fir mortality is directly caused by *Scolytu ventralis*, the fir engraver, which can cause the death of individual branches, tops or entire trees. The current bark beetle outbreak is probably the result of a combination of factors. Overly dense stands, single species composition, moderate drought conditions, chronic mistletoe infestations, root disease and recreational site disturbances have combined to cause a level of stress making these stands highly susceptible to successful fir engraver attacks. The “self thinning” of these stands will likely continue until densities have been significantly reduced, Fir Engraver populations crash, and or precipitation increases.

Management options to reduce mortality are limited after an insect attack has started. Trees that are currently infested (even though partially green) have a high probability of dying. This is evidenced by earlier attempts to fell hazard trees, only to come back a week or two later to find additional dead trees. Felling and removal of infested trees within the campground will have only a minor impact on overall fir engraver populations as the surrounding areas are in much the same condition. Long term solutions would certainly involve stocking control within these stands to enable current uses to continue, while minimizing future drought and stress related mortality.

### Immediate Concerns

Public safety is the primary concern, and the extended use of this area for camping and hiking and parking makes it a high priority to minimize potential hazards. Cutting and removal of completely dead trees would provide a very short term solution, as many additional trees are expected to die over the next year or two. The silviculturist recommendations were to fell all the trees exhibiting signs of insect infestation, as previous attempts to cut only dead and fading trees proved futile. Signs of infestation include recently dead tops, fading foliage, dry frass on the bark, sunken patches of bark. These symptoms, especially when associated with bole cankers, rot, or root damaged trees present an unacceptable risk to forest users.

At least 50+ trees needed to be cut to minimize the hazard to the public from falling trees or limbs. Until the fallen trees and slash are removed, the resulting slash concentration within the camp ground has created an unacceptable fire hazard within the campground, as well as making the general area inaccessible.

### **Longer Term Actions**

The mortality observed within the campground is evident throughout this elevation of the American River Canyon. Efforts need to be made to initiate thinning and fuels reduction program on both the public and private lands.

### **Peregrine Falcon Update:**

The falcons have hatched and fledged. The parents and young are still using the area. The closed routes will be assessed at the end of August to see if the falcons are still using the areas. Contact Susan Yasuda for more info @530-647-5317.