

eComment
Ordinance 2022-11

Catherine Cassidy

Location:

Submitted At: 12:58pm 05-15-22

Re: Ordinance 2022-11 My name is Catherine Cassidy, I reside in Kasilof. In the late 1990s I served on Mayor Navarre's Spruce Bark Beetle Working Group. I'm afraid we have forgotten the lessons we learned from that last major beetle infestation. The same falsehoods that were used to justify mitigation then, have popped up again now, in Ordinance 2022-11.

One was that the presence of the dead spruce would increase fire risk. Not really. Dead trees are flammable but lack the chemical volatility that green spruce contain. During the 1990s we were told that the Peninsula would turn into a vast grassland if the dead spruce were not removed. Turned out, grass took over plenty of areas that were logged or cleared. A favorite argument in favor of logging/cutting back then was that otherwise we would lose out on the value of the timber. As I recall, even with the chipping business infrastructure that was in place at that time, there was very little revenue for anyone.

Our timber does not command much, if any, money but our dead trees have value. Research done since the last infestation has found evidence that spruce bark beetles have significantly thinned Kenai Peninsula forests at intervals of 20 to 60 years, without associated fires (Berg, E. E., R. S. Anderson, and A. D. De Volder. 2003; Berg, E.E, Henry, J.D., Fastie, C.L, De Volder, A.D. , and Matsuoka, S.M. 2006). Dead and downed timber returns the nutrients back into the soil for the next, inevitable, cycle in our forest succession. Our forests are naturally messy, that allows them to do their job and support the wildlife we so enjoy. The very idea that these local boreal forests should be "walkable" for humans is absurd.

Yes, we are experiencing another infestation outbreak and, of course, urban and developed areas and trails need to be kept safe and clear. But our forests have developed a working strategy over the eons. We just need to stay out of the way and make sure our solutions aren't worse than the problem. The Borough's plan to "mitigate" by "removing all dead/dying trees" and "reforesting with native tree species" is completely unrealistic and poorly informed. It would waste millions of dollars and would harm, not improve, wildlife habitat.

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I realize that passing the Ordinance doesn't actually implement the proposed Forest Management Plan and I hope oversight of the project is strict, realistic and judicious.