Information Note: Western Spruce Budworm

January 15, 2026

Figure 1. Moth life stage. Credit: Stephan Bernhard (2025)

What is Spruce Budworm?

The western spruce budworm (*Choristoneura occidentalis*) is a native insect that feeds on the needles and buds of conifer trees. Its primary host is Douglas-fir, but it also affects spruce, subalpine fir, larch and occasionally lodgepole pine. During outbreaks, budworm caterpillars consume new foliage and buds, reducing tree growth and resilience. Severe defoliation can lead to stem defects, top-kill and even tree mortality after consecutive years of attack.

The Current Outbreak

- The outbreak is at historic levels across Douglas-fir dominated forests in southern interior and coastal B.C.
- Impacts are being observed in mixed-species stands of all ages, from low to high elevations (350–1460 m).

Impacts to Forests

- Reduced tree growth; mortality
- Increased susceptibility to other pests and diseases
- Challenges for forest management, carbon sequestration, and wildfire resiliency

Figure 2. Defoliation & webbing. Source: Government of Canada

BCTS Chinook Business Area Strategy

- Our Chilliwack field team is assessing affected area and are in the early stages of response planning.
- Priority action: Salvage of severely impacted stands in planning for forest harvest. This will maintain sustainability objectives, increase forest health and fibre utilization, and support wildfire resiliency.
- The 2026 Operating Plan identifies some priority areas where we are conducting preliminary assessments.

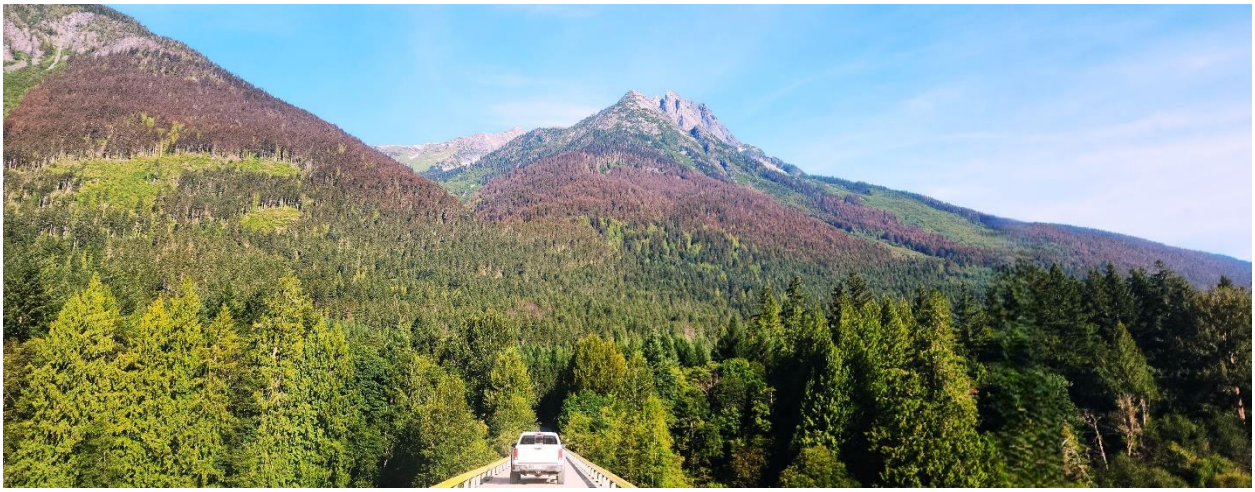

Figure 3. Dead and dying trees across the landscape from the current outbreak. Credit: Stephan Bernhard (2025)

This is a dynamic situation; we are working with districts and other ministries to understand the outbreak and its impacts. Our western spruce budworm management strategies will continue to adapt to changing climates, forest conditions and infestation rates.

Community Engagement

Engagement opportunities on BCTS operations and activities will be provided as more information becomes available. We value collaboration with communities, interest holders and First Nations. Your input helps us balance forest health, community values and economic sustainability. For questions or comments, please contact the Chilliwack field team at BCTS.Chilliwack@gov.bc.ca.

Additional Resources

- Ministry of Forests website: www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/industry/forestry/managing-our-forest-resources/forest-health/forest-pests/defoliators/western-spruce-budworm
- Ministry of Forests bulletin: Forest Health Bulletin August 2025. PDF

Figure 4. Left: mature larvae life stage (source: Government of Canda). Right: pupae life stage (source: Government of BC)

BRITISH COLUMBIA | BCTS BC Timber Sales