

**Ministry of Natural
Resources and Forestry**

Office of the Minister

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**Ministère des Richesses
naturelles et des Forêts**

Bureau du ministre

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May 4, 2023

Dear Colleague:

Ontario has been experiencing an outbreak of spongy moth (previously referred to as gypsy moth and LDD) since 2017, particularly in southern Ontario and parts of the northeast region of the province. The outbreak peaked in 2021 and declined significantly in 2022.

Last year, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) conducted aerial and ground surveys to map damaged areas and [forecast](#) defoliation for 2023. The results suggest the outbreak area and severity will continue to decline in 2023. Some areas, mostly in the southwestern part of the province, may still experience severe defoliation, but it's expected that large contiguous areas of defoliation will be limited.

Severe spongy moth infestations are cyclical, occurring every seven to 10 years, and usually last three to five years. The ministry will continue to monitor spongy moth throughout the current outbreak cycle.

Although the ministry conducts pest management programs on Crown land to protect foliage of high value stands (e.g., jack pine and spruce budworm programs), management of spongy moth on private land is the responsibility of the landowner or municipality. The ministry supports these efforts by providing [information on forest pests](#) and options for reducing defoliation by spongy moth. [Ontario's Invasive Species Centre](#) also offers resources and information to help people prevent spongy moth from damaging their trees.

In the spring and early summer, spongy moth larvae consume leaves, defoliating trees and leaving them looking nearly dead. Spongy moth prefer oak trees, but during severe outbreaks other hardwoods and, in some cases, conifer will be defoliated. Hardwood trees can produce a second crop of leaves during the growing season allowing them to continue growing and storing nutrients into the fall and winter months. Since conifers can't produce a second crop of foliage, they may be impacted by severe defoliation. Healthy growing trees can withstand a few seasons of severe defoliation before branch and twig dieback start to occur.

In the spring, landowners can put bands of burlap around their trees. This gives the larvae a place to congregate during warm days and they can be physically removed and killed. In the fall, landowners can remove and destroy egg masses.

Landowners wishing to reduce impacts on their property can also have trees sprayed with registered pesticide in the spring by a licensed insecticide application company. This is best carried out by coordinating efforts with other local landowners.

If landowners are considering having their property sprayed, it is best to engage a licensed insecticide application company as early as possible.

There are also natural controls on spongy moth populations in Ontario:

- Cool, wet conditions provide an ideal environment for a natural fungus (*Entomophaga maimaiga*) known to contribute to spongy moth population collapse.
- A viral infection (nuclear polyhedrosis virus or NPV) also kills spongy moth larvae.
- There are other natural enemies of spongy moth as well, including parasitic insects and predators such as birds and mammals.

I have attached a fact sheet and a roles and responsibilities document to help your office assist your constituents who may have questions about managing spongy moths during the outbreak period.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Graydon Smith', written in a cursive style.

The Honourable Graydon Smith
Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry

Attachments