

County to help fight sudden oak death

August 2, 2021



The Curry County Board of Commissioners is assisting forest officials in their battle against an outbreak of Sudden Oak Death in Port Orford, some of which falls on county property.

After a researcher with Oregon State University discovered a patch of dying tanoaks near Highway 101 in Port Orford in April, concerns about the fungus-like plant pathogen in Curry County have escalated. Even more troubling, the strain of SOD they discovered there was previously unknown to wildlands in North America — NA2 — and the outbreak is much larger than forest officials initially thought, as reported by the Pilot.

In fact, they found nearly 400 acres and hundreds of trees have been infected, including some on county property at the Port Orford Transfer Station, which is operated by Curry Transfer and Recycling.

At a board meeting on Wednesday, Sarah Navarro, forest pathologist with the U.S. Forest Service, discussed ODF's plans for treating the infected site with the commissioners.

After cutting down the infected tanoaks, forest workers plan to haul the infected debris to the nearby transfer station, where they will use a high-tech incinerator called an air-curtain to burn it, hopefully decreasing the possibility of airborne spread. According to Navarro, ODF will rent the incinerator, which can consume up to 20 cubic yards of debris per hour.

Before doing so, ODF needed permission from the board to use the county-owned transfer site, which they received on Wednesday.

Commissioner John Herzog, who toured the infection site earlier in the week, was in favor of ODF's treatment plan.

"I am in complete agreement with letting them come on to the county-owned transfer site...it's just a way to attack it," said Herzog.

Additionally, ODF requested the county stop all movement of yard waste from the Port Orford transfer station to Ophir to prevent further spread of the disease. The board also expressed a desire to approve this request.

"It's a huge war, and I think the county can approve a good send-off here, that this is the right direction to go," said Commissioner Court Boice.

Boice asked Randy Weise, sudden oak death forester with ODF, if one incinerator would be enough to handle what is sure to be a tremendous amount of debris.

Weise said ODF was easing their way into the treatment with just one incinerator, as this is a new technology for them.

As much of the infection site is located on private property, ODF is working to contact property owners, which is the first step in the treatment process. Another key to treatment is coming up with the money. A lot of money.

With the cost to treat and destroy infected trees averaging \$5,000 an acre, more than \$1.7 million will be needed to stop the spread near Port Orford, which is how much the state allocated to Curry County for SOD treatment for the entire year, as reported by the Pilot.

Sen. Jeff Merkley and State Rep. David Brock-Smith are advocating for additional funding from the federal and state governments for SOD treatment along the South Coast.