

FAQ – Gypsy Moth In The Parks, 2009

What's eating the leaves from the trees in the park?

Trees in this park are being fed on by gypsy moth, an invasive forest pest. Most years, the gypsy moth is present but is not noticeable because its population is low. Every 10 years or so, however, the population of gypsy moth can explode over a wide area in what are called outbreaks. Gypsy moth populations in many WI counties from Marathon to Kenosha and in Marinette County are in outbreak this summer. The gypsy moth caterpillars feed in May, June and early July. They feed on their favorite foods first, such as oaks, basswood, aspen, birch and willow but once those are finished, the hungry caterpillars will move onto maples, pines, hickory, spruces, walnut, hemlock, butternut and elm. There are few trees gypsy moth caterpillars won't eat; ashes, scotch pine, balsam fir and dogwoods.

What is the park doing to manage the gypsy moth?

While the gypsy moth can't be eradicated once established, there are things that we can do to manage the pest and the damage it does.

Biological Control. DNR Forest Health Specialists have introduced diseases and parasites that specialize on the gypsy moth to help bring it into better natural balance. Also, park managers encourage a natural forest floor over much of the property with shrubs, perennial plants and cover vital for the white footed or deer mice and shrews that are our most important native predators of the gypsy moth.

Silviculture. A healthy forest can recover from defoliation with minimal losses. Foresters monitor and can help improve the vigor of the forest by removing weak or failing trees or thinning overgrown stands, making more resources available to the remaining trees. Removing invasive plants which compete with trees or seedlings can also improve recovery of the forest.

Physical Control. While treating egg masses with horticultural oil or collecting caterpillars from under burlap bands is most appropriate for yard tree situations, park staff have also used these techniques in campgrounds to help reduce the pest population and as an educational example for visitors.

Treatment with Insecticide. Where outbreaks threaten to cause permanent damage that can't be prevented by other means, the park manager arranges for an aerial spray of insecticide to suppress the outbreak to a tolerable level. An aerial spray is the most cost effective method of treating large areas. Priority for treatment is given to areas of the park where loss of trees would not be tolerable such as campgrounds, picnic areas and other high use areas. The least persistent and most specific insecticides are used as is practical. In most situations, *Bacillus thuringiensis kurstaki* is the insecticide used. If a threatened or endangered moth or butterfly that would be in a susceptible stage at the time of spraying is present, the gypsy moth specific insecticide Gypchek is used. This pesticide is not commercially produced and the amounts available are limited which is why it is not used in all situations.

Why isn't the entire park sprayed?

Spraying is only done where gypsy moth threatens to cause significant damage that would impact the use of that part of the property. The decision to spray is made carefully weighing the pros and cons of insecticide treatment. Areas such as campgrounds or picnic areas would be badly impacted if trees there were defoliated or killed as a result of feeding by gypsy moth caterpillars. These areas have a high priority to be sprayed. Other parts of the park may have lower use by the public and be primarily valuable as wildlife habitat. In this case, a year of defoliation may be tolerable as a healthy forest will recover losing only weak or suppressed trees in a natural thinning.