

The SHORE LINE

Published by The Town of Pine Knoll Shores In The Interests Of Its Citizens

Post Office Box 757, Atlantic Beach, N. C. 28512

Volume V - Number 6

June 1984

Noel Yancey - Editor

State forestry experts say the hordes of hungry caterpillars that have defoliated thousands of live oaks and bay trees as well as hundreds of azaleas and other shrubs in Pine Knoll Shores are more of a nuisance than a serious threat to the trees.

FORESTERS SAY

"They (the foresters) don't consider it alarming, although we do," said Commissioner Ken Hanan in reporting on the situation to the Board of Commissioners at its June meeting.

MOTHS ARE NOT

SERIOUS THREAT

Coleman A. Doggett, a senior state forester from Raleigh, who toured the infected area in May along with other experts, said the caterpillars are the larva of the white marked tussock moth. He said in a letter to Hanan that he considered the insect "is more of a nuisance in your area than a threat to your trees." He added, however, he was "worried about the azaleas" which "are being defoliated very heavily."

Hanan said the state experts called the Pine Knoll Shores outbreak of the tussock moth "the heaviest they had ever seen." The moths are mostly in the cocoon stage presently.

Hanan told the board Doggett had promised that his agency would keep a close watch on the situation to determine if additional generations of the pest can be expected this year. Doggett said "if, as anticipated, no additional generations occur this summer, we will conduct a biological evaluation of the insect next winter" and will then advise on "control options" which could include aerial spraying of the infested area -- generally the area south of Salter Path road. However, the pest has infested large areas north of the road and has crossed the canal in spots.

Blanche Yancey said the caterpillars had infested her property on the north side of Salter Path Road by the thousands and had stripped her live oaks and other trees and her shrubs, including azaleas, of their foliage. She said that the smallest of the caterpillars even got into her house by slipping under the screens. In early June her house was plastered by the cocoons which had succeeded the caterpillars.

"It's like a horror movie," said Mary Kanyha at the height of the caterpillar outbreak. "I have to close my windows because the little ones have been crawling through the screens and into my house." She said she feared most of her azaleas had been killed.

Doggett said the present moth generation was too far advanced for an areawide chemical control program to be effective this year. However, individuals with nuisance problems could spray them with B-T, Orthene or Sevin.

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