

**DYING TREES:** A dozen are being taken down and removed

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Most of the other dead trees are birch landscape trees, but other ponderosas are showing signs of stress.

Public Works Director Paul Bertagna and the City's contract forester Dan Galecki assessed the downtown trees and found many in trouble.

"Basically (Galecki) did an evaluation of every tree over two inches (in diameter) in downtown," Bertagna said.

"Both Paul and I have noticed that some of the bigger pines have been taking hits," Galecki told *The Nugget*.

The culprit is clear: "I'm identifying it mostly as drought," Galecki said.

Galecki notes that the City's dying birch are "shade-tolerant" ornamental trees. They can be planted in the open, and many are in the downtown landscape. That's usually OK, but in recent conditions, they have suffered.

Lack of water and the intensity of the sun in the June-July heatwave took a toll.

"In a year like we're having now, that's a vulnerable tree," Galecki said. "That tree

is just cooking every day."

Dave Vitelle of Bear Mountain Fire has the contract for tree removal. Though he makes part of his living cutting down trees, Vitelle loves them and hates to see them go.

He recommends watering priority trees and getting rid of junipers in close proximity because they have a high capacity to "steal" water. Vitelle is leery of attempts to provide extra nutrients. He's seen that create bad scenarios where more harm is done than good.

"It's a pretty complex system," he said. "I generally try to stay away from any fertilizing of trees."

He also advises not doing anything that will add more stress to trees.

"I would avoid any pruning of live limbs — or even dead limbs if they're attached to live."

Watering should be done in the early morning hours or in the evening.

Galecki concurs that watering can help — but it's not a silver bullet.

"I do suggest watering and Paul does water — and it can help sometimes," he said. "However, if they're turning, there's not much you can do."

And the trees are turning fast after first showing signs of stress. Galecki says that the



PHOTO BY JIM CORNELIUS

**Birch trees have been hard hit by dry conditions and the baking sun of a two-week heat wave.**

accelerated rate of decline is unusual.

There's pressure to get dead trees removed quickly, too. Dead trees are an open invitation to infestations that can make a bad situation worse.

"You'll start to have issues with insects," Galecki said.

Bertagna said that the City's tree nursery is in good shape.

"The nursery is good — but of course it's irrigated," he said.

The problem is, of course, not confined to the city limits. A drive along the highways of Sisters Country shows browning pines everywhere.

"It's spooky; it really is,"

said Bertagna. "I don't like it." And it could get worse.

Vitelle notes that climate forecasts show the possibility of the development of El Niño conditions, which could mean another dry winter — setting Sisters Country up for more die-off.

"It's going to be tremendous next season," Vitelle said. "I hope not, but..."

It's painful for folks who love trees to see so many browning up and dying off. And it's frustrating that there's so little that can be done to arrest the process.

"There's no scientific secret answer," Galecki said. "We're just doing the best we can."

**Seats open on parks advisory board**

The City of Sisters is accepting applications for one "in-city" (three-year term) and one "out-of-city" (three-year term) volunteer position to serve on the Sisters City Parks Advisory Board.

The board advises the Sisters City Council on matters pertaining to the acquisition, development, maintenance and preservation of public parks, trails and open-space areas.

The City Parks Advisory Board typically meets once a month and consists of seven members appointed by the mayor, with the consent of the Council. Applications can be found at [www.ci.sisters.or.us](http://www.ci.sisters.or.us) or at Sisters City Hall located at 520 E. Cascade Ave. Applications will be accepted until 5 p.m. on Friday, July 31.

For more information contact Community Development Director Patrick Davenport at 541-323-5219 or at [pdavenport@ci.sisters.or.us](mailto:pdavenport@ci.sisters.or.us).

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