

War of the bugs to start in seven states

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Thousands of Asian beetles will soon be roaming across seven states, attacking a tree species that's encroaching on waterways in the U.S. West.

The tiny beetles are expected to attack tamarisk, also known as salt cedar. The bushy tree sucks up hundreds of billions of gallons of water annually, growing a foot a month to a height of 30 feet, USA Today reported. The tree's leaves secrete salt, halting all growth on the ground.

Tamarisk, imported from Asia in the 1800s as a garden ornamental, produces about 500,000 seeds a year. The species now infests more than 1.5 million acres from Mexico to Canada and from the Midwest to the Pacific, USA Today said.

The beetle voraciously feeds on the trees -- and nothing else -- throughout its 18-day lifespan, stripping trees of their leaves. Without leaves, there is no growth and no seeds to propagate.

In 2001, scientists released 1,300 beetles in Nevada fields overrun by tamarisk. Within two years, 400 acres of the invasive trees were stripped bare.

The 45,000 tamarisk leaf beetles were to be released Tuesday night at 24 sites in Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Montana, Oregon, South Dakota and Wyoming.

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