

# The West's famed aspen forests in peril

July 19 2006

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Colorado's famed aspen forests might be in peril, with large areas of the trees mysteriously dying.

The large-scale death of thousands of acres of trees in Colorado has been documented by aerial surveys, The Denver Post reported Wednesday.

"The aspen is in universal decline in the Intermountain West," aspen researcher Wayne Shepperd of the Rocky Mountain Research Station in Fort Collins, Colo., told the newspaper. "I haven't seen anything like this before in 37 years in the Forest Service."

The aspen, the most widely dispersed tree in North America, is commercially harvested for hardwood and provides food and cover for wildlife.

"We don't know how far it will go because we don't know what's causing it," aspen ecologist Dale Bartos told the Post. "I hate to sound alarmist but I am alarmed."

There seem to be no central reason for the aspen deaths, since the trees are dying in all areas, all elevations and in drought-stricken areas as well as fairly lush areas, the newspaper said.

"There is something else going on," Shepperd said. "We just can't put a handle on it."

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Citation: The West's famed aspen forests in peril (2006, July 19) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2006-07-west-famed-aspen-forests-peril.html>

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