

Researchers hope DNA will help fight pine beetles

Edmonton – Researchers are working to decode the DNA of mountain pine beetles, the trees they kill and a deadly fungus to find a way of slowing the spread of the destructive bugs.

Scientists at Genome Alberta and Genome British Columbia have launched a two-year study into how the genetics of the three organisms interact.

They hope the findings will indicate where the beetle infestation will spread to next and provide clues on how to disrupt the antifreeze system that helps the insect survive the winter, said Gijs van Rooijen, one of the chief scientists on the project.

Warmer winters have allowed the tiny bugs to flourish and spread. In B.C., 13 million hectares of lodgepole pine forests have been ruined in a scourge that has hit the forest industry and communities that depend on it very hard.

Over time, beetle-killed timber dries out and splits, lowering its value and making it more prone to forest fires.

) The Canadian Press