

COMMON INSECTS IN BEETLE-KILLED PINES

The insect you find may not be the one that killed the tree.

A dead pine becomes habitat for many insects. Some attacked while the tree was alive; others arrived later to use weakened bark, drying wood, fungi, or insects already present. Correct identification changes the management decision.



Peeling loose bark can reveal galleries, frass, larvae, predators, and other clues about what happened—and when.

● PRIMARY ATTACKERS

BARK BEETLES

Mountain pine beetles and Ips engravers can attack living or severely stressed pines.

- ✓ Mountain pine beetles create characteristic galleries beneath bark.
- ✓ Ips beetles often use stressed trees, fresh slash, and recently cut material.
- ✓ Species and life stage determine whether prompt action is still useful.

● SECONDARY BORERS

DEAD AND DYING WOOD

Longhorned beetles, pine sawyers, and wood wasps commonly arrive after decline begins.

- ✓ Large pale larvae tunnel beneath bark or deeper into wood.
- ✓ Oval exit holes and broad, irregular galleries are common clues.
- ✓ Most help break down wood and did not cause the original tree death.

● NATURAL ENEMIES

PREDATORS AND SCAVENGERS

Other insects hunt bark beetles or use the changing habitat without harming healthy trees.

- ✓ Clerid or checkered beetles prey on bark beetle adults and larvae.
- ✓ Ants and other predators may forage beneath loose bark.
- ✓ Woodpecker feeding is another sign that insects are active under bark.

✓ START HERE

- ✓ Ask whether the insect attacked living tissue or arrived after death.
- ✓ Compare gallery shape, exit-hole shape, frass, larvae, and crown condition.
- ✓ Check whether adult bark beetles have already emerged from the wood.
- ✓ Avoid moving untreated infested firewood to another property.

▲ THE RAVEN WORKS PERSPECTIVE

A dead tree is not biologically empty. It becomes a changing community of insects, fungi, birds, and decomposers. Management should focus on genuine risks—such as beetles that can still emerge—without treating every organism as a pest.

Identify first. Then decide whether the wood needs treatment, removal, retention, or simply observation.

Guidance basis: Colorado State Forest Service and CSU Extension bark beetle and wood-borer resources.

○ IN THE FIELD

Three practical realities help explain what is found inside beetle-killed pine:

LOCATION MATTERS

Insects beneath bark play different roles than insects tunneling deep in dry wood.

GALLERIES MATTER

Tunnel patterns and exit-hole shapes often reveal more than adult insects alone.

TIMING MATTERS

Freshly infested wood may carry risk; older, fully emerged wood tells a different story.