



STATE OF MAINE
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, CONSERVATION & FORESTRY
MAINE FOREST SERVICE
168 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333

JANET T. MILLS
GOVERNOR

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February 2024

To whom it may concern:

To facilitate response by towns and their residents, I am in touch to provide notice of **high or moderate detected populations** of Browntail Moth (BTM). The Maine Forest Service (MFS) conducts annual BTM surveys, and in the last several years, populations have been severe in many areas.

Browntail moth caterpillars have hairs that can cause a rash similar to poison ivy and respiratory distress in sensitive individuals. The hairs persist for years and can cause problems when mowing or other activities stir them up.

In late Summer 2023, particularly in Penobscot, Hancock, Knox, and Waldo counties, damage from newly-hatched caterpillars could be mapped from the air. This and other surveys indicate that populations are very high in parts of some towns and abundant enough to cause significant discomfort in a far broader area. An interactive map survey data can be found on our [browntail moth dashboard](#).

Our annual overwintering web survey is being conducted now and results will be available in early spring. The survey happens along roads in areas that have previously experienced problems and expands outward to encompass the generally affected area. These surveys are not exhaustive, and people should check the trees around them to understand BTM populations and the risk of encountering hairs at a finer scale. **Mid-December through March is the best time to do that.**

The [MFS BTM website](#)* has more information, including:

- [Description of the BTM and how to control it](#),
- [Survey resources](#), including what the overwintering webs look like,
- [Browntail moth dashboard](#), an interactive map that can be used to view data from our various BTM surveys
- A list of [Licensed Professional Arborists](#) and [Licensed Pesticide Applicators](#) who conduct browntail moth control work—those interested in hiring contractors for management should make contacts in the winter due to the high demand for services,
- Topics ranging from biology to management to State Law specific to BTM control near marine waters are found in the recently updated [frequently asked questions page](#).

We encourage towns to help educate residents and visitors about BTM and encourage and conduct management where practical. The MFS can provide technical advice and assistance for identification and management, and all the information on our website is available for electronic distribution or printing. A limited number of printed [informational brochures](#) are also available. Consider [signing up for our newsletters](#) and sharing the information found within them.

In 2024, we are again **encouraging our partners to schedule awareness-raising events and promote the management of browntail moth in February**. This effort could include organizing groups to map infestations on the town and school properties, hosting a public service web-clipping event, hosting a contest for the most webs clipped, or other community and knowledge-building activities.

PATTY CORMIER, DIRECTOR
MAINE FOREST SERVICE
18 ELKINS LANE, HARLOW BUILDING



In closing, browntail moth populations will be elevated again next year and until the outbreak collapses. The MFS and our partners are here to provide technical advice and assistance in response to this pest. We encourage you to join us in providing education, encouraging management, and conducting management where feasible.

Sincerely,
Thomas Schmeelk
Forest Entomologist
Maine Forest Service, DAF
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^Between the creation of last year's winter webs and the cessation of caterpillar activity in the spring of 2022, some areas experienced significant BTM population decreases due to disease outbreaks. To err on the side of caution, all towns with moderate to severe populations indicated in any survey between January 2022 and the present have been included in this notification category.

*http://www.maine.gov/dacf/mfs/forest_health/invasive_threats/browntail_moth_info.htm