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Browntail Moth Assessment for Falmouth, Maine

February 2022

Completed By:

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Purpose

The purpose of this assessment was to scout for Browntail Moth Nests along all public ways within 15 to 20 feet of public roads, and town owned property and parks to identify high risk areas that should be treated for possible control in May of 2022. Threshold levels used were approximately 8 to 10 nests per tree, or areas where there were multiple trees with six or more nests along or in a public way. There will likely be nests in some trees in some areas, but not at threshold levels. The intent of the Assessment was not to identify EVERY tree within the town of Falmouth public ways with nests, but to identify high risk areas using the above-mentioned thresholds. Tree species likely to have nests are primarily Oaks, Crabs, Apples, Black Cherry, and in some cases Birches, Beech, Poplar. Scouting was done by visual inspection driving along public roads and walking several town parks and preserves on January 25th, 26th, and February 1st.

Results

In the Spring of 2021 populations of Browntail Moth from Falmouth up through the Mid Coast region continued to be low. This is a result of a naturally occurring fungus called *Entomophaga* that grew in the population in the summer of 2019 and caused a high mortality rate of the caterpillars. Fewer larvae reached the adult stage to lay eggs, so in the last 2 years there has been a decline in the population. In the Spring of 2020 this resulted in about a 50% to 60% reduction of the population, and in the Spring of 2021 populations in these areas were reduced by approximately 90%. A treatment program for the Town was not recommended as the population in Falmouth was below threshold levels and there were no areas of 'moderate' infestation. **The completed assessment for the 2022 season found NO areas that meet the 'moderate' criteria with much of the community having no nests at all. Based on this assessment the recommendation would be to not proceed with a Browntail Moth Control Program again for this year.** That is not to say the pest is not present at all, but that the risk to the public is *extremely low*. Some residents could still acquire the associated rash, but that would likely be from contact with the hairs still in the environment from previous years with high populations. Hairs responsible for the rash can stay in the environment for up to 3 years after an infestation.

It is likely that the population of this pest will be very low for the next few years. Typically, Browntail Moth populations are present in high numbers for several years in a row, decline for several years, and then rebound. This has been the scenario for the last 20 years.

I hope this assessment is helpful in the decision of whether to provide a treatment program for Browntail Moth for the coming season or not. Please contact me with any additional questions or concerns.

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The Map below is from the State of Maine Browntail Moth survey done in Fall of 2021 showing areas where Browntail Moth feeding damage occurred in 2021. Note that there is no damage shown in Falmouth

