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# Browntail Moth Assessment for Falmouth, Maine

## February 2023

Completed By:

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## Purpose

The purpose of this assessment is the same as in years past, 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 2023. 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 24th, 26th, February 1<sup>st</sup>, and 2nd.

## Results

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 several years there has been a very low population in the Falmouth area. A treatment program for the Town has not been recommended for the last several years as the population in Falmouth was below threshold levels and there were no areas of 'moderate' infestation. **The completed assessment for the 2023 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. *Some* nests were observed near the intersection of Woodville Rd and Woods Rd, but these infestations are very light and back on residential properties and not along the public way. The risk to the public is *extremely low*. Some residents may 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 possible that the population of this pest may increase in the next several years, but weather and the presence of the *Entomophoga* fungus will be the determining factors. 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.

The "hot spots" continue to be Cumberland center, No Yarmouth (and Yarmouth village this season, up through Lewiston / Auburn and surrounding areas. It drops off a bit in Augusta (where the *Entomophoga* was found active) but Waterville and particularly the Bangor area is very heavy\*

\*NOTE: This assessment was compiled from ground observations driving Falmouth public ways, and discussions with Alison Kinoti, Director of Forest Health for the Maine Forest Service. To date, the State has the data from ground and aerial surveys, but that has not been compiled and published.

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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