



Back Country Horsemen of North Georgia Newsletter

Spring 2009 Susan Shedd, *Editor*

*Dedicated to the Gentle Use, Protection and Preservation of Georgia's Trails
and Back Country*

HEMLOCK WOOLLY ADELGID INFESTATION NOW IN THE COHUTTAS

From the USFS "Trail Talk" Newsletter

The hemlock woolly adelgid, a non-native insect, is killing the two eastern US species of native hemlock trees, the Carolina hemlock and the Eastern hemlock in Georgia. A native to Asia, it was introduced to the Pacific Northwest in the 1920s and to the eastern US in the early 1950s. Unlike the western hemlock, no natural resistance to the adelgid has been found in eastern hemlock trees and since the exotic pest lacks natural enemies, it has spread throughout the east.

If you've been to the Great Smokey Mountains National Park in the past few years, you've probably seen the effects. It was first discovered in Georgia in the Chattooga River gorge in 2002 and has since spread southward and westward across the Blue Ridge Divide crest. The adelgid finally reached the eastern flank of the Conasauga Ranger District in 2008 when it was discovered in the Cashes Valley area and on a single hemlock in the upper Conasauga River drainage in the Cohutta Wilderness.

The adelgid covers itself with a white, waxy "wool" which acts as a protective coating for the insect. Adelgid infestations are easily recognizable

by the appearance of tiny "cotton balls" at the base of hemlock needles. The "wool" is most conspicuous on the undersides of branches from fall through spring. The insect feeds on the sap at the base of the needles causing the needles to change from deep green to grayish green, and then fall off. Without needles the tree starves to death usually within 3 – 5 years of the initial attack.

Hemlocks provide deep shade along creeks, maintaining cool water critical to survival of trout and other cold water species. Without active intervention, the forecast is for 90% of existing hemlock to be dead within 5 to 10 years. While not all hemlock can be saved, the Chattahoochee National Forest is taking action to save as many trees as possible to maintain the viability of the hemlock species. Two types of treatment are being used to kill adelgids: the release of predatory beetles which feed exclusively on adelgids and the application of insecticide that is either injected or buried in the soil at the base of the tree or injected directly into the tree.

If you discover evidence of the adelgid, please contact the USFS office in your district.