Why Should We Save the Hemlocks?

Eastern hemlocks are in grave danger of being wiped out as a species by an invasive insect called the hemlock woolly adelgid that was accidentally imported six decades ago. The bad news is if we do nothing, they will all die. The good news is that we have the ability to save them if we act quickly. There are many urgent reasons for doing so, and here are some of the most important ones. Please consider them and then join the fight for the hemlocks.

AESTHETIC APPRECIATION


- The hemlock has been called a "charismatic megaflora." Many people consider them to be the most beautiful and graceful tree in our mountain vistas, public and private forests, and personal landscapes, inviting residents and visitors alike to experience a sense of solace and restoration, creativity and inspiration.

-Often when people learn that these magnificent evergreens are in danger of being wiped out similar to the American Chestnut, they become passionate (and often active) in the efforts to save them.

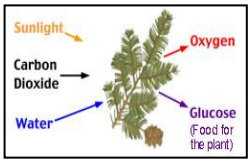
ENVIRONMENTAL & ECOLOGICAL HEALTH



- Scientists regard hemlocks as a "keystone species," as many other plants and animals depend on them in significant ways.

- Importance to wildlife: Hemlocks provide food and habitat for about 120 species of vertebrates, including bear, rabbits, deer, and wild turkey as well as 90+ kinds of birds. They help maintain cool stream temperatures for trout and other native fish. Ten species of mammals, eight species of birds, and three species of macro-invertebrates have strong ecological connections.


- Importance to other plants: Hemlocks provide abundant shade necessary to many of our native plants such as various sedges, trilliums, lady slippers, jack-in-the-pulpits, and ferns, and some of these are listed as rare, threatened or endangered plants. Hemlocks help maintain the rich diversity of plant life in our forests and help prevent the spread of invasive plant species.



- Importance to air quality: Hemlocks contribute greatly to air quality, filtering pollutants from the air, removing tons of CO_2 and other greenhouse gases from the atmosphere, creating oxygen for us to breathe, and supporting human respiratory health. And since they're evergreens, they perform these vital functions year-round.

- Importance to water quality and conservation: Their extensive root system prevents stream bank erosion, filters out pollutants before they reach the waterway, and prevents build-up of harmful bacteria, all of which helps avoid overburdening public water systems. Streams lined with hemlocks almost never dry up in summer or freeze in winter. These facts are particularly important to the Atlanta area since the majority of its water originates in the hemlock forests of north Georgia.

- Importance to soil conservation: Their root system also helps hold the soil on slopes, preserving the soil they and other plants need to live in, preventing rapid downhill runoff into rivers and streams, and helping protect against the kind of massive flooding and landslides we've seen in other parts of the country.

- If the hemlock goes the way of the Chestnut, there will be a detrimental ripple effect throughout the entire eastern hemlock native range, which stretches from Georgia along the Appalachian Mountain chain to Maine.

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ECONOMIC VITALITY

- Economic value to the community: North Georgia counties with hemlocks enjoy over $1 billion of tourist spending annually. Outdoor enthusiasts account for a quarter of this revenue. The 90,000 fishermen who enjoy the Chattahoochee National Forest contribute more than $43 million in annual revenues. Recreational and tourism spending and the purchase of property mean income through sales tax and property tax revenue for local communities and the state to support the services we require of them.

- Economic value to individuals & families: Healthy mature trees provide beauty and privacy that can contribute 7-10% in value to private properties and whole neighborhoods. Hemlocks around homes provide the cooling effect of 10 room-sized air conditioners running 20 hours a day. In the forested counties of north Georgia, recreation and tourism account substantially for job opportunities and personal income. These facts should resonate with anyone who has planted landscape hemlocks to beautify their home, owns property or a second home in the north Georgia mountains, or has business connections there.

STEWARDSHIP & PERSONAL CONSIDERATIONS

The hemlock has held an intensely personal meaning for generations of people because of the special sense of history and place they create and memorable family outings enjoyed under its evergreen canopy.

For some people, appreciation of the hemlock derives from an intellectual understanding of the complex interdependencies in our environment and the finite capacities of the natural systems that sustain us.

Others perceive its value in relation to the economic and/or political consequences of managing our resources wisely (or not) both locally and globally.

Families may recognize the plight of the hemlock as an opportunity for teaching values of respect for nature, personal responsibility, and environmental stewardship to their children

Many people are drawn to it by the awesome beauty hemlocks create in special places and their terrible fragility, and still others see preserving the hemlocks as a spiritual matter rooted in a belief that we have a care-taking role for our planet and all its creatures.

Please join Save Georgia's Hemlocks in our efforts to ensure that the magnificent hemlock will be here for our children, grandchildren, and many generations in the future.

"Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where nature may heal and give strength to body and soul." – John Muir

"We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children."
– thought to be from a Native American source.