

You can help save the Hemlocks from the Woolly Adelgid

Adelgids are aphid-like insects almost microscopic in size. Their life cycle produces two generations per year amounting to as many as 300 eggs per adelgid. When hatched from the eggs, the nymph adelgid uses their thread-like mouthpart to pierce a hemlock branch at each needle and suck the nutrients from the branch. Adults, as well as the nymphs, actively suck the life out of the hemlock causing the hemlock needles to dry out and drop. The tree can die in 3-5 years if left untreated.



Don Wells, President of the Mountain Stewards, a 501(c)(3) organization located in Jasper GA, has announced completion of the Phase One hemlock treatment in the Wildcat Tract of the Dawson Forest Wildlife Management Area. From Canada to Georgia, the hemlock trees are dying because of the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid pest. In some forests, 90% of the trees have been killed.

To stop the destruction of the hemlocks, the Mountain Stewards partnered with the Wildlife Resources Division of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, the Georgia Forestry Commission and organizations from the adjacent land owner, Big Canoe. Together, a plan was developed to treat the hemlocks in this area, monies were raised to purchase the chemicals and acquire the specialized injectors, and volunteers were recruited to augment the Mountain Stewards Trail Crew.

Beginning in March 2011 and continuing through April 2011, the Spring treatment program was executed treating 9,701 trees having a combined diameter-inch of 56,763. That means that the crew had to punch more than 56,763 holes into the soil around the base of the trees and inject the chemicals, which the trees absorb. Depending on the size of the tree, from one to six injections of chemicals are put into each hole. On flat ground, this would be a laborious task. However, the Wildcat Tract is not flat but mountainous with steep ravines and limited access points to the hemlocks. Thus, the crew had to trek up and down the mountains, cross over and under fallen trees, ford streams, and push through thick underbrush to get to the hemlocks. In some cases, the crew had to go as far as a half mile just to get to the starting place to work. While some members of the crew were treating the hemlocks, others were mixing more chemicals and bringing them far into the forest to the crews. For the Phase One Spring effort, 863 volunteer hours were needed to treat the almost 10,000 hemlocks. The crews will begin again in the fall to treat another 6,000 trees.

At a cost of \$75.00 a pound for the chemical which treats about 2 acres of trees, this is a costly endeavor. The current program will save about 425 acres of hemlocks in the state forest. Another 60 acres are being treated with predator bugs, an alternative treatment protocol. There is insufficient monies to treat all of the hemlocks in the Dawson Forest but at least a portion of them will be saved. If more monies become available in time to support the treatment program, more hemlocks will be saved.

The 4,500 acre Wildcat Tract of the Dawson Forest Wildlife Management Area in Dawson County has one of the largest populations of hemlocks left in Georgia. These trees grow along the mountain creeks and tributaries providing shade for the mountain streams and their fish species as well as providing the unique habitat needed by many animals. The Wildcat Tract also has 12 miles of trails for recreational use including hunting, fishing, hiking and other recreational uses. Loss of the hemlocks in this area would be a devastating blow to the continued recreational use of these state-owned lands.

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All donations to the Mountain Stewards at P.O. Box 1525, Jasper, GA 30143 for treating the hemlocks are tax-deductible.