

Friday, March 12, 2010

Georgia has help on the way for Tennessee Hemlocks



By: Pam Sohn

Proving that Georgia and Tennessee are not always warring neighbors, a grassroots nature group in Georgia is coming to the aid of Tennesseans who need help saving the region's Eastern hemlocks from a tiny, non-native and invasive bug.

The group, Save Georgia's Hemlocks, is mentoring several local Tennessee agencies and enabling them to offer a program of education and charitable service to combat the hemlock woolly adelgid.

"This pest is a serious problem and, without treatment, many trees will die and upset the area they are in," said Christine Bock, lead horticulturist with the Tennessee Aquarium.

Ms. Bock, foresters and other ecologists have said that, when forest hemlocks die, the stream banks on which they often grow lose shade. That, in turn, raises water temperatures in streams that support trout, which need a certain temperature to survive.

Also lost will be the hemlocks' dense, year-round shelter where birds take cover as well as shade-loving rhododendron and forest wildflowers living underneath the trees.

Experts have said the bugs, recently found on Walden's Ridge, will spread over the Cumberland Plateau within the coming decade, carried by wind, deer, birds -- even people who brush against infected foliage. The bugs can kill a hemlock in seven to 10 years.

State and federal foresters have small treatment plans in the region's parks and national forests, but saving deep forest hemlocks and private community stands will fall to homeowners and community groups, Ms. Bock said.

Last month, Georgia foresters and Save Georgia's Hemlocks organized information sessions in Murray County, where the adelgid recently arrived. They also have established a pool of pesticide-filled injectors to lend to homeowners to protect their hemlocks.

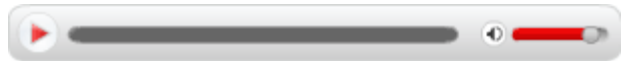
Donna Shearer, chairman of Save Georgia's Hemlocks, now is helping the Tennessee Aquarium, the Benton MacKaye Trail Association, the Chattanooga Nature Center, Reflection Riding and the Lookout Mountain Conservancy bring similar help to Tennessee.

"It's a beginning step in making people aware," Ms. Shearer said.

Rick Harris, a physician on the board of the Benton MacKaye Trail Association, said his group first got involved to save hemlocks along the 300-mile trail through Georgia, Tennessee and North Carolina. During that effort, they recognized that no one is helping private communities.

"We don't have to stand by and watch these hemlocks die," he said.

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Christine Bock

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The Hemlock woolly adelgid now is attacking Eastern hemlock trees in the Tellico and Ocoee districts of the Cherokee National Forest. Photo contributed by National Forest

IF YOU GO

- * What: Hemlock Help Clinic
- * Where: Chattanooga Nature Center auditorium
- * When: 1-2:45 p.m. Saturday, April 10, for help information; 2:45-5 p.m. if you want to volunteer for the facilitator training program to help your neighborhood.
- * To pre-register, contact Christine Bock at the Tennessee Aquarium at 423-785-4024 or cjb@tennis.org.

Hemlock facts

- * Eastern hemlock is a long-lived conifer of cool Eastern climates.
- * It offers valuable shade along delicate stream banks and year-round shelter to wildlife.
- * It also often is planted ornamentally due to its versatility and beauty.
- * The hemlock's future is now in question due to the spread of the hemlock woolly adelgid.

Source: Tennessee and Georgia foresters