



TV program tells how to take care of hemlocks

Dahlonega-based Save Georgia's Hemlocks produced the program

By Elizabeth Burlingame eburlingame@gainesvilletimes.com

POSTED: March 17, 2011 11:02 p.m.

Homeowners can find out more about their hemlock trees, and ways to stop the pesky bug that threatens them, on a special television program airing this week. The 30-minute special on the Windstream cable show "Common Cup" was created by the Dahlonega-based group, Save Georgia's Hemlocks.

"It's an opportunity in a short space of time to learn a great deal about what the problem is, what the available solutions are, what they would cost and why it would be important to do it," said Donna Shearer of Save Georgia's Hemlocks.

Shearer said for nearly 60 years, the hemlock woolly adelgid has been taking residence in hemlock trees from Georgia to Maine. The bug, native to Asia, was discovered in Virginia in 1951. It kills trees by feeding at the base of the needles, which eventually turn brown and drop off.

Shearer said saving the hemlocks, which grow near streams and rivers, is vital to the health of forests and wildlife. "Many animals and birds are dependent on hemlocks for nesting sites, food and shelter," she said.

She added that dying hemlocks could affect water quality and soil erosion. The broad trees also provide shade to woodland plants and fish. "They keep the stream temperatures cool. If the temperature were to heat up, it could adversely affect the abundance of fish," Shearer said.

The documentary will provide property owners with information about the variety of treatments. "The (hemlock woolly adelgids) are hitchhikers," Shearer said, adding that they can cling to deer, birds or camping gear.

One solution is to use another insect, a natural predator beetle, Shearer said. The beetles are native to Japan and feed on adelgids there. "They're considered experimental, but we're rooting for the success of the beetle program," Shearer said. Pesticides have also been used on trees, usually applied to the soil at the base of the tree to be absorbed, she added.

Shearer said her organization, which focuses on helping property owners save their trees, made the TV program to raise awareness about hemlocks. There are also economic reasons to keep the trees healthy, she said. North Georgia often attracts outdoor enthusiasts, and the loss of the trees could impact tourism dollars. "Hemlocks can also add 7 to 10 percent to a person's property value. If those go away, you've lost a chunk of change," she said.

For viewers who miss the original broadcast or don't have access to Windstream cable, Shearer said a link to the program will also be listed on the organization's [website](#).

