

Around Town

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Teams treat infested hemlocks on MacKaye trail

by Donna Shearer

Save Georgia's Hemlocks

Local nonprofits Save Georgia's Hemlocks and the Benton MacKaye Trail Association (BMTA) recently co-sponsored a Hike and Help for the Hemlocks event along a wonderful section of the BMT that runs through the Cherry Log Mountain Development.

The goals for the event were to increase awareness of the hemlock crisis, build synergy among groups and individuals who care, treat some trees that really need help and have a good time together in the great outdoors. Mission definitely accomplished!

Following an initial orientation and training session, 38 volunteers enjoyed a family-friendly hike through some beautiful woods, treated 160 trees that are infested with the hemlock woolly adelgid (HWA, the invasive insect that is killing the hemlocks) and did some trail clean-up along the way. Joe Sisson, president of Sisson Company in Cherry Log, kindly donated the cost of the chemicals used to treat the trees.

When the work was done, everyone gathered beside

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Hemlocks

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Indian Lake for a picnic and time to get to know each other better. Jim Wentworth of the U. S. Forest Service gave an update on the hemlocks in the national forest and the HWA control methods being used there, and Jay Dement of the BMTA shared a lesson on the core principles of the Leave No Trace program for outdoor ethics.

On a second visit later in the month, SGH volunteer facilitators treated an additional 50 large hemlocks. A product containing Imidacloprid, a mild but highly effective treatment material, was applied by soil injection close to the base of each tree and is expected to provide residual protection averaging five years.

Sincere thanks are expressed to Joe Sisson of the Sisson Company; BMTA president Dick Evans; BMTA planners Ralph and Marge Heller; hike leaders Tom Keene and Bruce Granger;



Volunteers treat hemlocks infested with the woolly adelgid along the trail.

treatment team leaders Frank and Linda Gheesling, Clyde Lightfoot, Bob Pledger, John Ross, Mark Shearer and Jim Wentworth; and all the other great volunteers who participated.

North Georgia property owners are urged to inspect their hemlocks for signs of HWA infestation, including small white

woolly egg sacs on the underside of the branches, a drab gray-green color of the tree and a thinning of the needles. Since adelgids can kill even a large hemlock in as few as three to six years after infestation and the bugs have already been present for several years, timely action is imperative to



Photo by Whitney Crouch

Outdoor enthusiasts enjoy a wonderful hike along the Benton MacKaye Trail as part of a Hike and Help event benefiting infested hemlock trees.

save these trees that are so important to the beauty, environmental health and economic vitality of mountain communities.

If symptoms of infestation are found or suspected, call the Hemlock Help Line at 706-429-8010.

Websites for these two organizations are www.savegeorgiashemlocks.org and www.bmta.org.

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