



## 2013 Hike & Help the Hemlocks Sponsored by Save Georgia's Hemlocks and the Benton MacKaye Trail Association



Saturday, September 28, 2013

On Saturday, September 28, Save Georgia's Hemlocks and the Benton MacKaye Trail Association (BMTA), in partnership with the U. S. Forest Service, celebrated National Public Lands Day with their annual Hike and Help the Hemlocks event in the Cooper Creek Scenic Area of the national forest. During the morning fifty-six volunteers, led by Jim Wentworth of the U. S. Forest Service and Donna Shearer of Save Georgia's Hemlocks (SGH), pitched in and treated over 300 hemlocks for the woolly adelgid, the invasive insect pest that's killing these valuable trees from Maine to Georgia.



While it is logistically impossible to save every hemlock in the forest, seven treatment teams (which included a large group from the Georgia Tech Trailblazers) worked in two of the conservation areas designated by the Forest Service to preserve a genetically diverse population of hemlocks and allow for regeneration of hemlock forests in the future when the adelgid problem is brought to an acceptable level of control.

In a parallel adventure a group of twenty hardy hikers, led by Ralph and Marge Heller of the Benton MacKaye Trail Association, went for a wonderful 3-mile trek through a nearby part of the forest containing areas of old growth trees. On a perfect day for being outdoors, they wended their way along the Yellow Mountain, Cooper Creek Connector, and Mill Shoals trails and enjoyed beautiful mountain views with a running nature commentary from some of the more experienced participants.



At lunch time the two groups came together for a lunch-and-learn picnic beside beautiful Sea Creek Falls and were treated to several interesting presentations. Jim Wentworth gave an update on the condition of the hemlocks on the national forest, hemlock treatment projects completed and upcoming in 2013, and news of the Trout Adventure Trail. Today's outing is the seventh treatment project completed by the USFS – SGH partnership.

Ralph Heller (right) told us about the BMTA's trail maintenance activities and hikes and reported on the condition of the hemlocks along the Benton MacKaye Trail. Don Wells of the Mountain Stewards reported on the two-year hemlock treatment project they completed in the Wildcat Tract of Dawson Forest, their Trail Tree Project, and their Indian Trails Project; Dave Teffeteller told us about the completed and continuing work of SGH, Mountain Stewards, and other volunteers to help the Georgia Department of



Natural Resources save hemlocks along the Cartecay River in Ellijay; Michael Rydell shared news of the environmental efforts and forest maintenance activities of Go Outdoors USA; Patrick Shower introduced the mission and activities of the Georgia Tech Trailblazers; and Mark Shearer (also known as The Hemlock Doctor) informed us about several new kinds of fungus that are attacking the already embattled hemlocks, including a particularly troublesome one called *Rosellinia* Needle Blight.



Finally Donna Shearer shared news of SGH's Hemlock Help Program expansion into 7 new counties this year, bringing the total to 14 counties served by the program, and highlighted the hemlock planting project being undertaken by the Chestatee High School in Gainesville.

She offered sincere thanks to all who participated in this most enjoyable and productive celebration.