

Commission musters troops to do battle with invasive species

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COLUMBIA - The forest protection division of the state's Forestry Commission is taking a proactive approach to protecting some of the upstate's most precious and vulnerable tree species.

In the coming months, crews under the leadership of the agency's entomologist, Laurie Reid, will be aggressively treating Carolina hemlocks and Eastern hemlocks against a pest known as the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid.

A stimulus grant of \$178,000.00 will pay for the recruiting, training and the equipping of a team of six HWA "foot soldiers," whose primary function will be to apply soil injections of chemicals around the bases of the threatened hemlocks. They'll apply systemic insecticide into the soil adjacent to infested trees. The trees' roots take up the insecticide and the chemical moves to the needles where the HWA are feeding, thus killing the adelgids.

The work will occur only on state lands in Oconee, Pickens and Greenville counties and will benefit trees growing at or up to 50 feet from a water source.

"This is basically a stop-gap measure," admits SCFC forest protection chief Darryl Jones. "The treatment we're doing will benefit the trees for a period of about five years."

Hemlock Woolly Adelgid was first detected in South Carolina in 2001. Since that time, HWA has been detected in all South Carolina counties with hemlock trees (Oconee, Pickens, Greenville, and Spartanburg counties). This invasive species has significantly altered the character of this tree's traditional range, in some places wiping it out of its former habitat entirely.

Treatment for HWA proved successful in the spring on heavily visited areas such as Jocassee Gorges, Caesar's Head Mountain Bridge Wilderness Area, Long Shoals Roadside Park and Poe Creek, all state-owned properties in the mountainous upstate of South Carolina. High-priority areas include trees near headwater streams, park administration sites, camping sites and hiking trails.