

Pest killing hemlocks across North Georgia

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This large Eastern hemlock on the Berry College campus has not suffered from the hemlock woolly adelgid infestation that is killing off trees all over North Georgia. The Friends of Cloudland Canyon State park and Save Georgia's Hemlocks are hosting a workshop at Cloudland Canyon June 17-18 to help people understand how the insect is killing the trees and what can be done to slow the spread of the pest. (Doug Walker, RN-T)

Hemlocks in North Georgia are dying off at a rapid pace, and the culprit is the hemlock woolly adelgid — an insect that has been spreading across the region for at least six years, eating the trees from the inside out.

“They suck the sap out of individual needles, causing them to brown and fall off. Eventually, the trees die,” said Martin Cipollini, professor of biology at Berry College.

The Friends of Cloudland Canyon and Save Georgia's Hemlocks will host a workshop in June for nature lovers who want to learn more about the adelgid and take part in an effort to treat trees and stem the spread of the pest.

Donna Shearer, chairwoman of Save Georgia's Hemlocks, said the sessions would be similar to a Master Gardener program, with participants becoming prepared to assist state and federal agencies with initiatives to save the trees on public lands.

Hemlocks can generally be found along stream and creek banks. They can grow to heights well in excess of 100 feet. “They are very important for keeping mountain streams cool enough, and thus sufficiently high in oxygen, to support trout,” Cipollini said.

The training session is set for June 17-18 at **Cloudland Canyon State Park** in Rising Fawn. The Friday session will run from 4 to 8 p.m. and the Saturday session will last from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. There is a \$20 registration fee for anyone who is not already a **Save Georgia's Hemlocks** member.

John Logan, a volunteer with Friends of Cloudland, said the workshop will offer a thorough analysis — from assessing the infestation to treatments and environmental safety. Friday night participants will get a briefing on how the hemlocks can be saved and why it's important. Saturday participants will assist in treating trees within 100 feet of campsites, trailheads and roads.

Logan said adelgids are so small that someone would need a set of jeweler's glasses to see one. They are carried by the wind, or on the backs of birds or animals, to spread from one area to another. “The chemicals are just a Band-Aid,” Logan said. “We know it's probably going to be a never-ending battle until we get our predator beetles.” Plans are to release the beetles to eat the adelgids. North Georgia State College and University has become a leading institution in producing the predator beetle.

People interested in the workshop can make reservations by calling 706-429-8010 or emailing donna@savegeorgiashemlocks.org.