



Save Georgia's Hemlocks

1-9-11 Meeting Notes

A quarterly board meeting of Save Georgia's Hemlocks was held Sunday, January 9, 2:00 p.m. at the home of Donna Shearer, 37 Woody Bend in Dahlonega. In attendance: Donna Shearer, Dave Teffeteller, Bob Pledger, Rob Strangia, Bonnie Mandel, and Donna Moorlag. Jimmie Walters was absent as she was attending the birth of a new grandchild. Congratulations, Jimmie!

Introduction of New Officers

Donna Moorlag was introduced as our new SGH Secretary. She and her husband David live in Dahlonega and have been active in the fight to save the hemlocks for several years. Donna is energetic, creative, and very organized and will be a great asset to SGH. Welcome aboard!

Bonnie Mandel, who joined the team as SGH Treasurer in August, was introduced to those who had not already met her. She and her husband Jeff live in Alpharetta and became interested in helping the hemlocks when they discovered adelgids at their Rabun County cabin last summer. Bonnie has already managed the transition of our financial records from Excel to QuickBooks and developed the set of FY 2010 year-end reports. Thanks, Bonnie!

Reconfirmation of Current Board Members

Current board members Bob Pledger, Dave Teffeteller, and Donna Shearer confirmed their willingness to continue board service during 2011. Rob Strangia, who has been a board member since the organization began in 2009, indicated that his current work schedule is likely to limit his availability for full board participation; therefore, he will be stepping down from the board after January but has generously volunteered to continue providing IT and GIS support for us, which we greatly appreciate.

Amendments to Bylaws

Two policies that are recommended by the IRS were brought forward as amendments to the SGH Bylaws by Donna S for a board vote. Jimmie submitted her votes by e-mail.

Document Management Policy – The purpose of this policy is to identify the responsibilities of board members and officers for the maintenance, storage, and destruction of the organization's documents and records in support of the organization's information management needs and in compliance with the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002 Section 802, IRS records retention requirements, and the charitable laws of the State of Georgia. Modifications to the original draft document were made, and then the amendment was adopted by unanimous consent.

Whistleblower Protection Policy – Board members, officers, and other members of Save Georgia's Hemlocks are expected to observe high standards of business and personal ethics in the conduct of their duties and responsibilities and to comply with all laws and regulations that apply to the organization. The purposes of this policy are to support the organization's goal of legal compliance and to encourage individuals to raise serious concerns within the organization prior to seeking resolution externally. This amendment was adopted by unanimous consent.

Hemlock Camp Meeting

The Hemlock Camp Meeting 2010 was recapped, including a brief summary of total participation, financial outcome, and post-event comments from participants. Team members indicated their willingness to consider holding another Camp Meeting in 2011 with the following suggestions:

- We should hold the event at a different venue that has adequate access and parking without the need for a shuttle system, that can accommodate a larger crowd, and that offers the option to be indoors/covered in case of inclement weather.
- We should clearly define the purpose(s) of the event – education and awareness, fund raising, membership drive, etc. And whatever main purpose is chosen, the opportunity to build membership should not be overlooked.
- We should strongly encourage all facilitators to attend and actively participate in the event.
- Bob and Dave suggested we should form a committee to plan and carry out the event in order to provide a better distribution of the work load and ensure continued focus on other objectives of the organization.
- A vote on whether or not to proceed will be taken at the April 10 meeting.

Review of FY 2010

Bob led a review of the Strategy Plan for 2010. The consensus was that the plan was very ambitious, a great deal was accomplished, and some items that were either incomplete or scheduled for the future should be carried over into the 2011 plan.

Bonnie presented a Financial Report for 2010, including a breakdown of sources of revenue, categories of expenses, and current balance in accounts. She also indicated that team members should turn in their expense reports and receipts for supplies or other organizational expenditures (whether or not for reimbursement) for proper recognition of their contributions. Donna will forward the Expense Report form to the team.

Dave suggested that board members, officers, facilitators, and other volunteers should also turn in a record of their volunteer hours. He indicated that potential donors/grantors look at levels of volunteer service and public support in their decision-making process.

Strategy Plan for FY 2011

Strategy Document – Bob led the discussion of our Strategy Plan for 2011. The draft plan is a compilation of input from team members, carry-over items from 2010, and a few “wish list” items for consideration. Each member agreed to review their part of the plan with special attention to target dates and other resources needed and send any revisions to Bob by January 23. Team members are also requested to include estimates for income and expenses related to specific strategies; Bonnie will use this information to prepare a preliminary budget for 2011 and later to track actual vs. budget. The paragraphs that follow deal with specific strategies.

Once Upon a Hemlock – The preparation of art work and production of this children’s book, written by board member Jimmie Walters and her niece Lisa Starr, were discussed. Dave pointed out that we need to define the purpose of the book – education only? fund raising? both? Donna S will augment the current text with a brief “FAQ and Family Discussion” section at the end. Dave took possession of the current art work and a paginated layout and will determine the steps needed for finishing the project. He agreed to renew contact with Lori Jenkins concerning the art work, and Bonnie will investigate other options. He and Bonnie also volunteered to investigate printing/production options and associated costs.

Awareness Campaign – Rob reported on his progress on the address databases for the awareness campaign. The plan is to mail postcards to property owners in the 9 current program counties (and possibly others) advising them of the spring HWA treatment season and urging them to take action. Data is now available for Fannin, Habersham, Stephens, Lumpkin, and White Counties; partial data is available for Rabun; and databases still need to be acquired and analyzed for Union, Towns, Gilmer, and Murray Counties. The mail-out is scheduled to take place in February and March.

Facilitator Network – Bob suggested, and the team agreed, that having a lead Facilitator in each program county would be beneficial for coordinating service activities, encouraging more local retailers to carry treatment products, monitoring HWA infestation levels, and capturing service hours. Donna S suggested that we should require annual refresher training for recertification of Facilitators and begin providing either quarterly newsletters or immediate news flashes to Facilitators.

Charitable Service Projects – It is an objective of SGH to provide charitable hemlock-related services to individuals, public agencies, and other nonprofit groups based on their need and availability of our resources. The grant received from the Lake Rabun Foundation in 2010 included funds for such projects in Rabun County. All team members are requested to be on the lookout for appropriate projects in other counties and to give thought to the amount of our budget that should be available for that purpose.

WindStream Cable TV Special – Dave and Donna S will work together on preparing the script for a 30-minute special about the hemlock crisis to be aired on “Common Cup” during the spring. Then Dave will meet with the production team to make arrangements for finalizing the visual components and taping the show. Dave also suggested we might pursue doing a program with Walter Reeves on the gardening channel.

Fairs and Festivals – Donna M reported on her initial investigation of fairs and festivals for possible participation. The information she is gathering includes average attendance and booth costs to be considered in choosing events. Rob volunteered to send her information on some of the Atlanta festivals; he and Bonnie also volunteered to help with Atlanta-based events as time and their work schedules permit. Donna M will send the most up to date information to the team before the January 23 revision deadline so decisions can be made and the chosen activities can be included in the formal 2011 Strategy Plan. Donna S notes that participation in such events would require volunteers to staff the booths.

Membership/Volunteer Corps – Dave suggested that we hold a focused membership event. Donna S suggested that we might conduct a one-month membership campaign leading up to the membership event to coincide with our anniversary celebration in July. The following ideas were discussed:

- The event could be a pot luck picnic, possibly with an SGH grill master preparing hotdogs and hamburgers but no catering. Ideally the location should provide indoor/outdoor options with restrooms and adequate access/parking.
- Invitees would include current members, each of whom would be encouraged to bring another friend as a potential member. The invitation list should also include any facilitators that are not already formal members and could include other interested persons as well.
- Ideas were put forward concerning kinds of “swag” that could accompany new or renewed memberships – free hemlock seedlings, the planting or treatment of hemlocks on a charitable basis, etc.
- The membership period would be from July 1 to June 30, with a grace period for individuals who join during the quarter immediately before July 1. This approach would alleviate the need to do monthly tracking of membership periods and would provide an ongoing base of financial support.
- Rob reported that we now have 100 FaceBook Friends, but he and Donna S agreed that we need to improve our utilization of social networking for building our community of members/volunteers and our base of financial support.
- Dave stressed the importance of getting new members involved immediately in ways that are meaningful to them and useful to the organization. Assessing interests and skills of members and volunteers could become a responsibility of a person (board member or other resource) who would focus on building our membership/volunteer corps.

- Donna S will send her database of “interested” parties to Dave for use in planning membership appeal activities.

Program Outreach to Youth – The group agreed that young people such as school children and scouts are the future hope for winning the hemlocks vs. adelgids battle and that more outreach programs should be conducted with these groups. Donna S indicated she already has lesson plans and support materials that have been used with several middle school groups and shared with one scout group in Fannin County. Dave mentioned that he has experience designing boy scout merit badge programs and suggested that a hemlock helper badge could be developed. Donna S will send copies of the current lesson plans to Dave and to Bob also.

Fund Raising – The following ideas were discussed.

- We need to build our base of financial support through memberships and other individual contributions. We should also identify and pursue additional grants.
- We need to understand our constituencies better in order to plan appeal campaigns and/or specific events. Regarding special events, the team feels that at present most of our local north GA audience is inclined toward the casual family style, but it may be appropriate in the future to consider a special event with more upscale style for the right audience in the right place.
- Regarding an appeal campaign, Donna S suggests that if we decide to send out another direct financial appeal to a select donor list toward the end of the year, the physical mail-out should occur during Thanksgiving week. It could also be accompanied by an e-mail appeal to a broader audience.

Board Matters

SGH has (or will soon have) 3 openings on our board. Donna presented draft documents that outline the responsibilities and functions on a nonprofit board, the attributes and requirements for a SGH board member, and an analysis of strengths and weaknesses in our current board composition, along with a draft search letter and board application/nomination form. A key requirement is willingness to commit time and energy to the work of the organization; specific areas in which the team feels we need additional strength include fund raising, teaching/presenting, member/volunteer recruitment and development, event planning, research, environmental issues, legal matters, newsletters and other communications.

All team members are requested to review the draft documents and provide feedback to Donna S by January 23 and to submit potential candidates as soon as possible. An e-mail campaign will be launched in early February to seek nominations. It is hoped that we will have our full complement of board members and officers in place by April 1 and confirmation by the general membership can take place by April 10.

Other discussion focused on the importance of team members working with each other on shared strategies and ensuring timely communications and responses by phone and/or e-mail.

Next Meeting

The next quarterly meeting will be a board work session, currently scheduled for Sunday, April 10 from 2 – 5 p.m. in Dahlonega. Other persons interested in participating are welcome.