Clemson Cooperative Extension

CU IN THE WOODS

HEMLOCK CONSERVATION COALITION FORMS IN THE UPSTATE

By Carolyn Dawson

Two years ago, retired US Forest Service Ranger, David Hedden entered the Oconee County Extension office and politely asked if anyone was doing anything to save the hemlock trees in the Upstate. In case you were not aware, there is a tiny insect named the Hemlock Wooly Adelgid (HWA) that is threatening the existence of the eastern and Carolina hemlocks trees. The prognosis for hemlocks is not good. If you have them, it is not a matter of if they will get the insects and die, but when. Luckily for David, he stopped by the Oconee County Extension office and the seed was planted to turn concern and passion into actions.

A year prior, Clemson Extension hosted a meeting featuring Donna Shearer, founder of Save Georgia's Hemlocks, to help educate the public about the issue of the Hemlock Wooly Adelgid. Donna has an extremely successful non-profit organization that treats thousands of hemlock trees in Georgia every year with the help of volunteers. We decided to ask her to return to help educate us on how to get a similar organization started in Upstate South Carolina. With her support, knowledge, and guidance, Clemson Extension invited several agencies and organizations to meet up and form the Hemlock Conservation Coalition (HCC). The meeting was successful with participants from the US Forest Service, SC Forestry Commission, SC State Parks, USFS Southern Research Station, Clemson University, Clemson Extension, and several non-profit organizations in attendance.

Members of the Hemlock Conservation Coalition
Photo credits: Carolyn Dawson

The HCC's goal is to identify, educate, treat, and protect as many hemlocks as possible in South Carolina. As we speak, we are applying for grants to help fund the treatment of our hemlocks in city municipalities, conservation easements, and other specifically designated areas. The US Forest Service and state parks in Oconee County have been treating their hemlocks for years, therefore it was not an area of focus. In addition to HCC, David and his wife Carla recently received a 501(c)(3) status to start their non-profit organization called Carolina Hemlocks. Through their efforts, they have identified and documented close to 300 trees in Walhalla alone that are in need of treatment.

Last May, the HCC and Carolina Hemlocks held an inaugural Meet, Greet, and Treat Meeting to introduce their organizations and start recruiting volunteers. In October, they held a Treatment Demonstration Workshop, and they plan to hold several more volunteer treatment workshops in 2020.

So, perhaps you are curious as to how the hemlocks are treated. Glad you asked! There is an easy, safe, and fairly inexpensive treatment you can do to ensure the trees will live. Mind you, the treatment will need to be repeated at a minimum of every three years but could last up to five years. If treated, your hemlocks should continue to thrive. The treatment involves using the pesticide imidacloprid which is not restricted. In fact, it is the chemical found in many flea and tick topical medications. The treatment for trees is not strenuous and

consists of a method called soil drenching. Basically, you rake the leaves or mulch away from the trunk, poke several holes around the base of the tree and pour the treatment liquid in them. Then, finish by replacing the leaves. Be sure to read the label for correct dosing amounts as well as the required personal protective equipment to wear while using it.

Hemlocks are considered a keystone species of the Appalachians. They provide shelter, protection, nesting, and food for many species of animals. They also help moderate stream temperatures which could impact trout. The loss of our hemlocks is predicted to have impacts on forest ecosystems throughout the eastern United States. The HCC desires to ensure the survival of the hemlock tree species in the Upstate of South Carolina.

If you have Hemlocks on your property and would like education and/or assistance on how to treat them, the HCC and Carolina Hemlocks would love to help. For more information contact: Carolyn Dawson, Clemson Extension Forestry Agent at (864) 638-5889 or Dawson4@clemson.edu.

Soil drench treatment of a hemlock for control of the Hemlock Wooly Adelgid
Photo credit: Carolyn Dawson

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https://www.clemson.edu/extension/forestry/newsletter/newsletter_files/2020-winter-forestry-newsletter

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