



ENVIRONMENTAL AND PUBLIC PROTECTION CABINET

Steven L. Beshear
Governor

Robert D. Vance
Secretary

Capital Plaza Tower
500 Mero Street, 5th Floor
Frankfort, Kentucky 40601
Phone: (502) 564-5525
Fax: (502) 564-3354
www.eppc.ky.gov

NEWS RELEASE

Contact: Alice Mandt (502) 573-2886

Save Kentucky's Hemlocks *New organization formed to combat insect killer*

FRANKFORT, KY (March 21, 2008) – A voracious insect is threatening Kentucky's hemlocks. The insect is the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid, which feeds on a hemlock's needles and eventually causes its death.

A diverse team made up of land managers, foresters, wildlife biologists, entomologists, public officials, and citizens has formed Save Kentucky's Hemlocks. The new group seeks public support as it takes action to protect and save hemlocks from the adelgid.

The non-native insect, which originated from Asia, was found in Kentucky in 2006, when it was discovered in native hemlocks in Harlan County. It has since been found in Bell, Leslie, Letcher, Pike, Powell, Clay, and Whitley counties, and much farther west on trees in urban areas in Grayson and Oldham counties. The adelgid feeds on the hemlock's needles and reproduces exponentially throughout the warm seasons. As summer passes into fall and the temperature drops, the insect prepares itself for the winter season by producing little cocoons- resembling minute cotton balls- that protect it from the cold. This white powdery appearance on the hemlocks is not snow; it is a sign of death.

"We are concerned that Kentucky may lose its hemlocks much like the American chestnut was lost," said Alice Mandt of the Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission.

The hemlock provides aesthetic beauty, critical habitat for a variety of bird species and other wildlife, and perhaps most importantly, its dense foliage protects streams from the sun's harsh rays, Mandt said. Without the protection the hemlock provides from the sun, oxygen levels in streams would begin to plummet and fish species and other aquatic life that depend on this type of habitat (such as black side dace, a federally listed fish) will be harmed. The hemlock's ability to shade streams and the surrounding soils also prevents other undesirable, non-native species from regenerating in those areas.

If left untreated, the adelgid will leave a graveyard of trees that appears as standing skeletons on streams and hillsides in as little as five to seven years from the time of initial infestation. This has already occurred in the Smoky Mountains and the Shenandoah Valley. Fortunately, new tools are becoming available to slow down and counteract the destruction spread by the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid.

Save Kentucky's Hemlocks is working to help both public and private landowners to treat their hemlocks. In order for Kentucky to save the trees, the organization will need the help of Kentuckians across the state. The group seeks volunteers to assist with such tasks as surveying and reporting the location of adelgids, helping with fundraising events to gain funds needed to fight the insect, and working in teams to treat adelgids.

Persons interested in joining the organization, making a donation to a nonprofit fund, volunteering, or obtaining more information may contact Alice Mandt, Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission at 502-573-2886 or Donna Alexander, Kentucky Natural Lands Trust at 877-367-5658.

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