

**PRIVATE LANDOWNERS ASSISTANCE TEAM
MEETING NOTES FOR 12-16-08**

Meeting took place at the Shearers' home at 7:00 p.m. on 12-16-08. In attendance: Mark Shearer, Bob Billings, Jack Rogers, and Tim Herrin. Forest Hilyer and Basil Bonner, who could not attend, sent their input via e-mail. Notes recorded by Donna Shearer.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

To utilize available funds and manpower resources to help as many landowners as possible to successfully manage the health of their hemlocks against the threat of the hemlock woolly adelgid.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goal 1: To provide a focused effort to inform landowners of the HWA threat and their options to manage it and assist them as needed.

Objective A: Train a core group of a dozen Facilitators who will interface with landowners to provide information, consultations, and DIY training.

Objective B: Conduct research to identify the target audiences and determine the best methods for reaching them to publicize our services.

Objective C: When appropriate and as resources permit, provide teams of volunteers led by a trained Facilitator to perform the treatment for landowners who request that level of help.

Goal 2: To increase the visibility and credibility of Lumpkin Coalition's contributions to the community.

Objective A: Enlist the help of The Dahlonga Nugget and other media outlets to publicize seminars and helping events facilitated by Lumpkin Coalition.

Objective B: Obtain permission from helped landowners to mention projects performed on their behalf on our web site and in other media.

Objective C: Perform some helping events involving city or county property as a demonstration of good citizenship and recognition of the taxpayers' interest and support.

Goal 3: To raise additional funds for the Coalition's hemlock project through grant proposals and donations from landowners and administer designated funds charitably for approved assistance projects.

Objective A: Maintain information on numbers of seminars conducted, landowners helped, and trees treated for use in grant proposals and general donor solicitations.

Objective B: When appropriate, carefully negotiate donations from helped landowners who wish to "pay it forward" for the hemlocks' defense.

Objective C: When appropriate and approved by the Board, donate chemicals and/or labor to assist landowners based on both financial need and commitment to conservation.

DISCUSSION OF HOMEOWNERS HEURISTIC

Q. Who will we try to help?

- Homeowners with special needs
- Public service institutions – schools, churches, libraries, city and county governments
- Forest Service
- DNR

A. Primary focus should be on homeowners, then public service institutions. Interest is high to give priority to homeowners along Lumpkin County's waterways because of the importance of the trees there.

NOTE: Didn't discuss helping Forest Service or DNR at this meeting except that we don't want to compete with their efforts but complement them if there is an appropriate way to do so.

Q. How will we help?

- Informational/training seminars
- Consultations
- Equipment loans
- Volunteer labor – treating trees, thinning, watering, replanting
- Grants, and if so, how managed

A. A group of a dozen Facilitators should be trained to conduct informational workshops for groups of homeowners – possibly as a big event in town or at Yahooola Creek Park or individual workshops located in each voting district. Facilitators will also provide telephone or preferably face-to-face consultations with homeowners about their needs and options, give DIY training to homeowners who want to treat their own trees, and assist them to borrow soil injectors and obtain chemicals. Mark offered to set up this training to occur before the end of January 2009.

In most cases, actually treating trees will be referred to a professional. However, if the opportunity presents itself and volunteer labor is available, Facilitators should be able to lead teams of volunteers to perform "boots in the dirt" work, including treating trees, thinning, watering in, and replanting.

NOTE: Didn't discuss grants at this meeting except that accumulating a record of homeowners we have helped can be used to demonstrate our commitment to active service in the community.

Q. What expectations will efforts/ donations assume? (cost of chemicals plus cost of labor)

- Donation for cost share by homeowner up to 75% (as Forestry Commission does)
- Donation for cost plus some percentage of market value
- Free in exchange for publicity

A. Seminars/workshops, consultations, DIY training, and access to borrow soil injectors should be done for free. LC has agreed to purchase 2 soil injectors for our own use on projects or for lending - might request a refundable deposit as the Forestry Commission does. Mark will make the purchase on LC's behalf (probably in early February) if the membership commits at the January meeting to support this initiative.

Mark can purchase chemicals for DIY homeowners at his (substantially lower) cost and be reimbursed directly by them. Although the homeowners cannot write the cost of chemicals off as a donation to LC, it will still save them money and keep the transactions clean from a 501(c)3 standpoint.

The expectations around "boots in the dirt" work will vary on a case by case basis. We want to be both fair and flexible, using our best judgment as we consider each homeowner's situation. Facilitators will learn to identify certain opportunities that could lead to a donation and others that may need to be done as a charitable service.

For the first type, Facilitators must avoid any "quid pro quo" transactions that would jeopardize our 501(c)3 status. They will be trained on how to make the homeowner aware of the possible cost of having the work done by a professional, explaining that while our service is free, a donation would be very much appreciated, and arriving at a clean agreement that would enable the homeowner to do so as a tax-deductible contribution. Hopefully, donation would equate to probable labor cost plus some percentage.

For the second type, Facilitators will be trained on how to recognize the need, make the homeowner aware of the possibility of obtaining our free service, and bring the opportunity to the Board for approval. For all "boots in the dirt" work, we should seek the homeowner's permission to mention the project on our web site and in other LC materials in order to further spread the message about our services to the public.

Q. What programs will we pursue?

- Riparian buffer protection
- Urban landscape protection
- Conservation assistance
- Habitat protection

A. The suggested order of priorities is (1) riparian buffer protection, (2) habitat protection, (3) conservation assistance, and (4) urban landscape protection. It was also suggested that we consider helping the hemlocks in new parks / trails development (e.g., Yahoola Creek Trails Conservancy).

NOTE: Although it was not discussed at this meeting, grants may be available for specific projects in some of the above categories.

Q. What will be the geographical scope of our activities?

- Lumpkin County
- Northeast Georgia
- All eligible areas in Georgia with hemlocks

A. It was recommended that we confine our initiative to Lumpkin County in the beginning. If interest and demand for our services are found to be strong in other North Georgia counties and if enough volunteers come forward, we may consider expanding into other counties. Another possibility might be to "clone" other groups like ourselves in other counties.

Q. What methods should we use to get our message out?

- Newspaper ads

- Flyers
- Area canvassing
- E-mails
- Studying county GIS maps to identify property owners likely to have concentrations of hemlocks, followed by targeted mailing

A. The first step should be to conduct research to identify our audience. Initially, the broad audience will be landowners in Dahlonega and Lumpkin County, with a more specific target audience of landowners likely to have hemlocks along major waterways in the county.

The next step should be to conduct research into the most effective and cost-effective methods for reaching those audiences. Possibilities include op ed pieces, public service announcements of upcoming workshops, or special focus stories in the newspaper (rather than paid ads); mass mailing of flyers (at bulk rate or by postal carrier route) to broad audience; mailing or contact by phone or e-mail to specific target audience based on study of GIS maps; radio ads. Could also prepare and publish (in newspaper and/or on web site) a map of known HWA infestations in Lumpkin County to raise awareness and promote action.

NOTE: First publicity needs to go out by end of January so first public workshops can be held in February.

Q. How will we begin to negotiate help?

- Trained volunteers
- Licensed professionals

A. Forest has e-mail lists of many concerned organizations that could help us spread the word about our services and upcoming information/training workshops. The Forestry Commission, Greg Sheppard in the Extension Office, and coordinators/directors at the 3 Georgia beetle labs could assist in referring homeowners to us. We could also work with the Chamber of Commerce, county commissioners, homeowners associations, realty associations, homebuilders associations, churches, and civic organizations in the county.

Q. Who can help connect us with people who need our service?

- County extension agent referrals
- Georgia Forestry Commission referrals

A. See above.

Q. How much volunteer help/time can we (LC members) reasonably commit ourselves to?

A. Good question. Facilitators will need to commit some initial amount of time to be trained and then some ongoing amount of time to perform interface functions with homeowners. By the time of the January meeting, we should have an estimate for the initial training time; ongoing interface time will be at the discretion of each Facilitator but should represent a reasonable and reliable commitment.

Time commitment for "boots in the dirt" work will be at the discretion of those who volunteer for specific opportunities as the dates and scope of work become known. The amount of time needed may also vary seasonally or with the optimum times to chemically treat trees based on aestivation periods.

We want to be respectful of people's personal lives, so the number and timing of such projects we can undertake will depend on the number of folks who are willing to participate. However, it would be helpful to get some idea of the members' level of interest at the January meeting.

Q. Where else will the volunteers come from?

- NGCSU students in environmental leadership courses or clubs
- LHS students in environmental courses or clubs
- Members of other local 501(c)3 organizations
- Eagle scout candidates

A. It was recommended that we reach out to other sources (such as NGCSU students, LHS students, Yahoola Creek Trails Conservancy, and other groups) to grow the pool of available volunteers and not rely solely on LC members. Basil also suggests folks from Camp Frank D. Merrill. Did not discuss Eagle Scout candidates at this meeting.

Q. What are the legalities and liabilities of what we are trying to do?

NOTE: Did not get to this at the meeting. Forest says, "Push the envelope." We'll do some research into this subject before the January meeting.

Q. How will we coordinate with and/or report to GA Forestry Commission?

NOTE: Did not get to this at the meeting. Earlier discussion with Scott Griffin of the Forest Service suggests it would be a good idea to work with Jim Sullivan of the Forestry Commission to determine how we should report chemical treatment locations and when such reporting would be appropriate/necessary.

Basil suggests that we request any protocols they currently have and review and then offer recommendations; or if they are in the development process of these protocols, ask to join them and/or provide input. We'll try to have more info on this before the January meeting.

Q. What types of knowledge, training, and/or certification will volunteers need?

NOTE: Did not get to this at the meeting. However, separate discussions with Sarah and Layla suggest that Facilitators need some understanding of the science related to the lifecycles of the trees and the woolly adelgids, the beetles and the chemical treatments. Facilitator training would also include how to present information and consult with homeowners about the HWA problem and available solutions, how to use the chemicals and injectors and train DIY homeowners in their use, how to negotiate with homeowners concerning "boots in the dirt" projects, and how to lead teams of volunteers to perform such projects.

Volunteer training on how to use the chemicals and injectors can be done in a group prior to a project or on site at the beginning of a project.

As we are not charging for any services, a licensed professional is not required on each project. However, Mark believes it would be important that he be present at least the first time each Facilitator leads a team of volunteers to offer advice as needed, address situations that may not have been covered in the initial Facilitator training, and assist in ensuring a positive experience for homeowners and volunteers alike.

CALENDAR OF ACTION ITEMS

Tim has been contacted to research our audiences, the best ways to get our message to them, and the associated costs for dissemination.	Before Jan. 13
Jack has agreed to draft a one-page flyer announcing our services and the date/place for the first public outreach workshop. Also will determine the cost for printing the flyer.	Before Jan. 13
Bob has been contacted to draft a “capabilities description” indicating the services a Facilitator should be able to provide.	Before Jan. 13
Mark has agreed to draft an outline of the training for Facilitators.	Before Jan. 13
Jack has agreed to present the Homeowners Assistance Team’s overall plan first to the Board and then to the general membership and ask for volunteers to become Facilitators.	At the Jan. 13 meeting
Mark will share the time, place, and agenda for the HWA symposium to be held at NGCSU on Feb. 4. Also the date/place for an upcoming outreach workshop to be held by a group similar to ours in Sautee and invite Facilitator volunteers to attend.	At the Jan. 13 meeting
The team will send out the first round of publicity.	By the end of January
Mark will purchase 2 soil injectors on LC’s behalf and conduct the Facilitators training.	In early February
The team will conduct the first public outreach workshop for homeowners in Dahlonega/Lumpkin County to share more about the HWA problem, their options for managing the health of their hemlocks, and the types of assistance available from LC.	In mid to late February
To date, one possible “boots in the dirt” opportunity has been identified that, if the group decides to undertake it, may lead to a substantial donation.	Probably beginning in March