



## Hope for the hemlocks: UGA opens predator beetle laboratory

It was a long time in the making. But the end result – a new laboratory for the rearing of predator beetles aimed at controlling the most deadly pest killing native hemlocks across north Georgia – seemed to make the wait worthwhile. The lab gleams with new coats of paint; sophisticated, climate-controlled rearing rooms, and all necessary to fostering a rigorously scientific effort to try to counter the devastating Hemlock Woolly Adelgid.

More than 35 scientists, state and federal forest managers, and committed conservationists gathered for the lab's official opening in mid-March, and to thank all the individuals and partner agencies that came together to make the facility a reality.

“Never have I seen such a diverse group working so passionately toward a shared goal. We are well prepared now to do quality research,” said Wayne Jenkins, Georgia ForestWatch executive director, credited by many as the key sparkplug behind the lab's establishment.

Rearing and releasing the predator beetles is part of the regional effort to try to find suitable and successful biological controls so that the hemlocks, among the most majestic and longest-lived of all trees in the southeast, can continue to reproduce naturally. Unchecked, the adelgids successfully are decimating hemlocks in the Southeast, with its mild winters, in as few as three years.

The lab at UGA is concentrating its early efforts on rearing two species of predacious beetles, *Laricobius nigrinus* and *Scymnus sinuanodulus*. It soon expects to receive an additional *Scymnus* species, *S. ningshanensis*, and begin rearing it, too.

In Georgia, that effort is seconded by a companion rearing lab at Young Harris College, which has concentrated its efforts on another beetle species *Sassijscymnus tsugae*.

The beetles are released on infested hemlock stands on the Chattahoochee National Forest, under the joint direction of the scientists and the U.S. Forest Service.

Tom Coleman, the new lab's manager, hinted beetle releases were aimed at finding a proper balance in the hemlock ecosystem. "We're not going to eradicate it (the adelgid)," he said. "We just hope to keep it at low levels where it's not killing our trees."

Jenkins said much the same: "We are all hopeful that this research will lead to successful placement and reproduction of a group of adelgid predators that can save these beautiful trees."

Jenkins also made a plea for continued financial support for the lab. "Now is the time to get our fundraising campaign in high gear," he said, referring to efforts to raise the additional \$60,000 needed to match a generous \$75,000 challenge grant proffered by the Turner Foundation. "The Turner challenge, matching each donated dollar for dollar, is a great opportunity for concerned citizens to help save these beautiful trees," Jenkins concluded.