

The Steep Rock *VISTA*

The Newsletter of the Steep Rock Association

Spring 1998

Wooly Adelgid Identified in Steep Rock *McClure will Release Beetle To Save Hemlocks*

What we've feared for several years has finally happened. The hemlock wooly adelgid has been found in Steep Rock.

We've reported many times that our hemlock trees have been under great stress. First we discovered that the trees were infested with the Hemlock scale. Then, in the early 1990's the Hemlock looper passed through the Reservations, killing many already weakened trees.

During this time, we were aware that the adelgid infestations were spreading northward and it was only a matter of time before they reached Steep Rock.

Early this winter, an alert hiker spotted the little white balls, often compared to small Q-tips, on the needles of several trees at the top of Steep Rock. These "Q-tips" are actually egg sacs and the insects inside will emerge in the spring. (See photo below, right) The adelgid insect feeds by piercing the needles of the Hemlock and sucking the tree's juices. They attack by the hundreds of thousands, and can kill a tree in a year. Many of Steep Rock's Hemlocks are already weakened by the Hemlock scale, and the concern is that they will succumb to an attack by the adelgid in a fairly short time.

Although no one knows for sure how the Adelgid came to this country, it is believed to have come from Japan. It was seen in Virginia in the 1950's and has been spreading northward since then.

Dr. Mark McClure, of the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station in Windsor, is one of the country's leading experts on the wooly adelgid. He has been advising us for several years. In fact, Steep Rock helped fund Dr. McClure's 1992 trip to Japan where he discovered several potential adelgid predators, including a black ladybug, the size of a poppy seed (*Pseudoscymnus tsugae*). After two years of study, the US Department of Agriculture issued Dr. McClure a permit to release the ladybug. Since 1995, more than 18,000 ladybugs have been released in six locations in Connecticut. The results have been very encouraging. Populations of adelgid have been reduced anywhere from 47% to 100% sometimes in as little as five months.

Dr. McClure will release ladybugs in Steep Rock this spring. We hope they will save our Hemlock forest.

Second Year for Spring Thaw Closing *Reservations Closed to Mountain Bikes and Horses*

For the second year in a row Steep Rock has closed the Reservations to mountain bikes and horses during the spring thaw. Signs announcing the closing went up on March 2.

Trails are particularly susceptible to erosion and damage during the freezing and thawing periods that regularly occur in early spring. Many of Steep Rock's trails are in a fragile condition already. They are eroding and showing signs of overuse and abuse.

Prohibiting the uses that create the most wear and tear on the trails - mountain bikes and horses - during this brief but critical time period will prevent further erosion.

The reservations may be closed for as long as four to eight weeks. This year's mild winter may mean a shorter "mud season" and allow us to reopen sooner.

RESTRICTIONS CONTINUE

When Steep Rock and Hidden Valley reopen, mountain bikes and horses will continue to be restricted.

- In Steep rock, mountain bikes are allowed ONLY on Tunnel Road and the Railroad Bed on the East side of the Shepaug River.
- In Hidden Valley, bikers may ride ONLY on the vanSinderen trail (yellow blazed) from its beginning at the barway on the east side of the Shepaug River until the trail reaches the Railroad Bed; then along the Railroad Bed to the property line barway.
- In both Steep Rock and Hidden Valley additional trails that prohibit horses are posted.



Hemlock Wooly Adelgid egg sacs.

Goshawk Aggression Begins In Early Spring

Some Trails Will Close



The Goshawks (*Accipiter gentilis*) that live in Hidden Valley will become active in the next few weeks. Our intrepid regular hikers in Hidden Valley are watching and listening for signs of increasing activity. The birds begin their courtship and nestbuilding in April - earlier if the winter has been mild. The pair of Goshawks that we are familiar with have nested in the same spot, on the ridgeline above the west side of the river (usually called the Bee Brook area), for several years. The birds are year round residents, but don't become aggressive until early spring. When we say aggressive, we do mean aggressive!

When there are eggs in the nest, the hawks may only circle above your head and call out warnings. When the eggs have hatched and there are fledglings in the nest the birds, usually the female, will swoop down on unsuspecting intruders with every intention of attack, emitting a piercing call the whole time. And not just one swoop, either. The birds will continue their attacks until the intruder is driven away from the area. We've dubbed this activity "Dive Bombing".

Last year there were more sightings over a larger area than ever. We had reports of repeated dive bombings on both sides of the river. Whether that means the resident pair has increased its territory or we have a new pair on the other side of the river is unknown.

We close the trails near the nest (they are actually hunting "corridors"! see Habitat, below) and we post the entries with warnings when we've determined that the birds are active again.

Some say that the birds attack the highest part of the intruder, i.e. your head! If you carry a stick raised above your head (perhaps even put your hat on the stick!), you may have some protection. The best protection, though, is to stay off the closed trails and be aware and cautious on the others.

OTHER GOSHAWK FACTS

HABITAT

Goshawks in Connecticut reside in mixed forest types: hemlock and northern hardwood forests. They like to have a corridor like river, or trail along which to hunt. The male does most of the hunting.

DIET

Goshawks eat chipmunks, squirrels, rabbits, and other mammals. They eat birds, too, such as blue jays and crows. They are fierce predators and agile fliers, and can catch other birds in mid-air.

NEST

The nest is large, 3-4 feet in diameter, and usually found high in a tree, balanced against the trunk or a main branch.

NESTING ACTIVITIES

Two or three eggs are laid in April or early May. The eggs incubate for 36-41 days. The young birds can fly about 45 days after hatching and they are independent 70 days after hatching. The female builds the nest, incubates the eggs, does most of the brooding and almost all of the defense of the nest.



Stewardship Plan Completed *Projects Underway*

The first of two Stewardship Plans commissioned by Steep Rock under the Connecticut Forest Stewardship Program is complete. Foresters Anthony Irving and Starling Childs of EECOS submitted their report in last December.

Several land management projects were recommended in the report, and we've begun two already.

The first, a riverbank remediation project, is located in Steep Rock, off Tunnel Road, near the Robling bridge abutments. The area has been used for parking and the resultant erosion, and compaction of the soil has created serious problems along the riverbank, to say nothing of the eyesore that greets people when they drive down Tunnel Road.

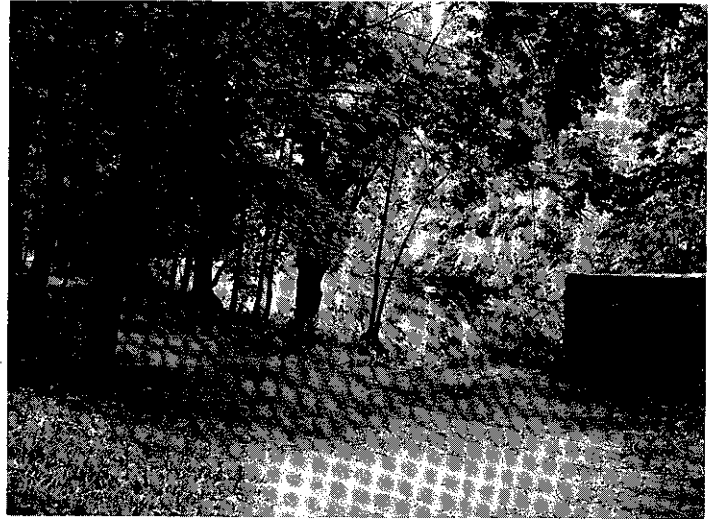
Our plan, which has the approval of the Washington Wetlands Commission, is to restore the area by closing it to vehicles, building up and replanting the soil, and stabilizing the riverbank.

A small parking area, to accommodate the cars of those who want to walk, picnic, or just enjoy the river at that point, will be created on the other side of the road (see photos at right).

Another project we've begun is in the parking area off Route 47 (Bee Brook Road) at the entrance to Hidden Valley on the east side of the River.

Now that the property lines have been clearly identified (there is a post and rail fence along the neighboring property owners line), we've begun to clean up and enlarge the parking area. We disposed of the pile of cement in the middle, so there is more room to turn, especially for the horse vans. (This is a popular entrance for horseback riders, and it's never been completely clear where they can park with their trailers.) We're also doing a modest amount of cutting on the side hill, to clear out some of the brush and make the trailhead of the vanSinderen trail visible (see photo last page).

The second Stewardship Plan, by Forester Peter Jensen of Open Space Management, grapples with trails: their management, use, creation and restoration. It will be finished in March. We'll report more on that Plan in the summer issue of *VISTA*.



Tunnel Road Area The Way it Looks Now



Tunnel Road Area The Way it Will Be

Annual Membership Drive In Progress

Steep Rock's Membership Drive corresponds to our fiscal year- September 1 to August 31. A contribution of any size entitles you to membership for one year. The funds raised help us to maintain the Reservations. Clip and use this form to send in your donation.

Name _____

PO Box /Street _____

Town _____

State, Zip _____

Send To:
Steep Rock Association
PO Box 279
Washington Depot, CT 06794

River Association Plans Events First on Friday, March 13, at *Washington Town Hall*

The Shepaug River Association, in an effort to increase public awareness and support, is planning a series of events this spring and summer. Many of the events will be sponsored and held by local organizations who support the efforts to save the Shepaug River. The first, sponsored by the Shepaug River Association itself, will be held on Friday, March 13 at 7:30 P.M. at the Washington Town Hall. Edwin Matthews, President of the Association, will be on hand to bring everyone up to date on what's been happening. People will have a chance to make comments and observations, and ask questions.

Billed as the Shepaug Talk Show, it will be just that, with an MC who will walk out into the audience to encourage participation.

More than three hundred people came to last year's town meeting in support of the River. We'd like to see that many at the Shepaug Talk Show.

There are also plans for:

- Canoe and Kayak Races in May
- A Block Party in Washington in June
- Summer time picnics in Washington and Roxbury
- Exhibits and Lectures

And, we hope, many more activities that celebrate our beloved Shepaug River.

Watch the local newspapers for announcements and further details.

We need help with all of this, and the Association needs members, too. Anyone who wants to join or volunteer will have an opportunity to do so at the March 13 event and all the others as well. A donation of any amount entitles you to membership in the organization, and you'll get a bumper sticker for your car and a pin to wear on your lapel or hat.

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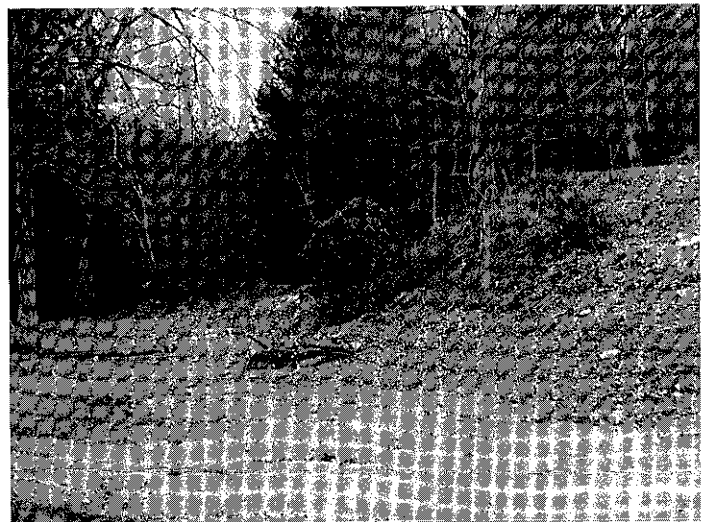
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Hidden Valley Entrance East of the Shepaug River

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