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Loss of Iconic Tree Species Prompts Reflection and Action

Oct. 20 event at Harvard Forest to feature science talks, field art tours, and film premiere

Petersham, MA - The Harvard Forest Fisher Museum will host a public event from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. on Saturday October 20, 2018, to explore species loss and encourage community action. A panel discussion and Q&A by experts on invasive species and human decision-making will augment guided tours of Hemlock Hospice, a field-based sculpture installation created by Harvard Forest Fellow David Buckley Borden. A short documentary film will also premiere.

The day's program will be focused mainly on eastern hemlock, a widespread tree in southern New England forests that has been the focus of intensive study at the Harvard Forest for many decades. Hemlocks are now dying across the East coast and throughout southern New England, due to an invasive, aphid-like insect called the hemlock woolly adelgid. Scientists project that hemlock forests in Massachusetts will be functionally extinct by 2025.

Hemlock woolly adelgid is not the only destructive insect to invade local forests in recent years. Gypsy moth, emerald ash borer, and other pests have heavy impacts in the region and will also be addressed by the speakers.

Doors will open for the Oct. 20 event at 10:00 a.m., and the first guided tour of Hemlock Hospice sculpture exhibition will begin at 10:15 a.m. The exhibition tells the story of the loss of eastern hemlock, and addresses larger issues of climate change, human impact, and the future of New England forests. It is embedded in a primary research area at Harvard Forest and involves about 1.5 miles of walking on uneven ground in the woods, so guests should plan to dress accordingly.

In a speaker program beginning at 12:00 p.m. in the Fisher Museum, scientists Dave Orwig, Laura Meyerson, and Valerie Pasquarella from Harvard Forest, the University of Rhode Island, and the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, respectively, will discuss the ecosystems we're losing due to invasive species in New England, the impacts this loss has on our landscape and human well-being, the changes we can expect to see in Central Massachusetts, and the range of actions community members can take.

The panel discussion will be followed by the premiere of a new documentary film by Faizal Westcott, Devin Chaganis, Casey Keenan, David Buckley Borden, and Aaron Ellison, about hemlock loss in New England and the Hemlock Hospice exhibition.

The film screening will be followed by a second guided tour of the art exhibition from 2:15 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

The Hemlock Hospice exhibit will remain on view at the Harvard Forest through November 18, 2018. Visitors can pick up a brochure from the Fisher Museum to self-guide. The Museum is open on weekdays from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., and on weekend days through October from 12:00 to 4:00 p.m.

David Buckley Borden, the interdisciplinary artist and designer who created the Hemlock Hospice exhibit, has been a Fellow at the Harvard Forest since 2016. During this period, he has collaborated with world-class ecologists on art-science communication projects involving landscape installations and arts-based interpretive trail design.

Says Borden, “The artist can play a unique role in communicating the reality of science. As environmental challenges become more critical, scientists are increasingly thrust into the spotlight to provide vital information to policy makers, community groups, and individuals. During my time as a Fellow at the Harvard Forest I have explored the question, ‘How can art and design support science communication to foster cultural cohesion around ecological issues and help inform ecology-minded decision making?’ The urgency of getting a population of non-scientists to both understand and care about aspects of ecology is real. And, ecological awareness is a powerful mechanism for environmental change.”

Harvard Forest Senior Ecologist Aaron Ellison, a central collaborator on Borden’s work, adds, “A field-based installation that blends science, art, and design, *Hemlock Hospice* respects the eastern hemlock and its ecological role as a foundation forest species; promotes an understanding of the adelgid; and encourages empathetic conversations among all the sustainers of and caregivers for our forests—ecologists and artists, foresters and journalists, naturalists and citizens—while fostering social cohesion around ecological issues.”

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The Harvard Forest, founded in 1907 and located in Petersham, Mass., is Harvard University’s outdoor laboratory and classroom for ecology and conservation, and a Long-Term Ecological Research (LTER) site funded by the National Science Foundation. Its 4,000-acre property is one of the oldest and most intensively studied research forests in the U.S. Open to the public year-round, the site includes educational and research facilities, the Fisher Museum, and recreational trails. Learn more about the Harvard Forest at <http://harvardforest.fas.harvard.edu>, and about Hemlock Hospice exhibition (including a trailer for the new documentary film) at <https://harvardforest.fas.harvard.edu/hemlock-hospice>.



Examples of David Buckley Borden's Hemlock Hospice exhibition at the Harvard Forest.
Top: Exchange Tree.
Bottom Left: Forest Lantern.
Bottom Right: Double Assault HWA.

Photographs by Aaron Ellison.