

## Public-Private Collaboration Restores Capitol Tree's Health

### The Challenge

A few years ago, several balsam fir trees on the Green Mountain National Forest were selected as candidates for the 2007 Capitol Christmas Tree. Months later, though, forest health experts found several of the most promising candidate trees heavily infested by a tree-harming insect, possibly balsam woolly adelgid (BWA).

A BWA infestation would be a serious problem and could easily knock the trees out of the running for the prestigious Capitol decoration. An infested balsam fir would gradually lose most of its needles before likely dying.

### The Solution

Retired Bennington County Vermont Forester Jim White monitored the health of the trees for the partners involved in its care. He called in U.S. Forest Service State and Private Forestry Northeastern Area Entomologist Dennis Souto to assist. Souto, who works out of Durham, N.H., helps track and manage forest health issues across the Northeast. He quickly confirmed White's suspicion: the bug was indeed BWA.

The invasive exotic insect attacks Fraser and balsam firs and is considered a serious forest health threat today. The forest pest, a native of Europe, was first introduced to our continent a little more than 100 years ago. It has since spread and is now distributed across much of eastern and western North America.

Though Souto had extensive experience managing forest health issues on a landscape scale, he had little experience managing the health of high-value trees one-on-one, he said. He called in another expert, Peter Wild, an arborist out of Massachusetts.

### Resulting Benefits

Wild's company did a lot of work protecting hemlock trees in eastern Massachusetts and had been successful mitigating hemlock woolly adelgid infestations, Souto said. He asked Wild if he could help with the BWA issue on balsam fir in Green Mountain National Forest. Wild might be able to take what he learned with a different insect and a different tree and try it out on the BWA on the balsam fir, he added.

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The Capitol Christmas tree cutting event from the Green Mountain National Forest.

The arborist brought his own people and material up to the National Forest and applied a systemic insecticide injection to kill off the BWA without harming the trees. He did not charge the government or the State of Vermont a penny for his work or materials, according to Souto.

Wild later returned to the site and applied a nutrient treatment to the soil beneath the trees themselves. A potassium treatment was later applied.

By the time the National Architect arrived from D.C. to make a selection at the National Forest, he said he was impressed with the quality of the trees.

### Sharing Success

Souto said a key player in giving the Capitol Tree story a happy ending was Peter Wild. "His expertise, judgment and generosity really made a difference in the outcome. It was nice because we could put a private contractor in contact with the State and a National Forest. There were a lot of players in this thing."

Souto downplayed his liaison role in the success story. "It's not because of my expertise in treating trees. I just knew Peter and his expertise in this field and that it might be helpful."

The Northeastern Area went on to communicate Wild's approach to Forest Service audiences and professionals in the tree care industry, so others might similarly save high-value trees.



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