



Mesic Conifers and U.P. Forests



2012 Conservation District– MDNR Hemlock Project

The DNR Wildlife Division and U.P. Conservation Districts have formed a cooperative partnership to assist with an on-going initiative to restore mesic conifers where they once grew in the U.P.

As part of this partnership, 160,000 Hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*) plugs are being offered at a special price to Conservation District customers and land managers across the U.P. in Spring 2012.

Why Hemlock?

Hemlock has largely disappeared from U.P. forests, where it was once a significant component of the mesic conifer forest that dominated this area. Mesic conifers are trees associated with moderately moist soil conditions and include white pine, hemlock, white spruce, and balsam fir. Mesic conifers have undergone a steep decline in the U.P. since the mid-1800's. During the early 20th century, Hemlock was particularly over harvested for its tannins. Here is what Hemlock can do for the forest:

- Provide essential winter cover for Whitetail Deer and habitat for species such as American Marten, Fisher, Northern Goshawk, and Blackburnian Warbler.
- Hemlock and White Pine can become super –canopy trees that function as nest sites for raptors and many other migratory birds.
- In winter, mesic conifer limbs intercept snowfall, providing essential winter habitat and greater mobility for a wide variety of wildlife species.
- Conifers capture moisture from the air and deposit water to the forest floor.
- Shallow -rooted mesic conifers tend to tip over rather than break off, helping recirculate soil nutrients, provide forest gaps that allow seedling regeneration, and act as nurse logs for new seedlings and a variety of wildlife species.

Where should Hemlock be planted?

Recommended areas for Hemlock include the higher snowfall zones of the northern and western U.P. Good candidate sites to under-plant Hemlock would include the following: 1. where there is historic evidence of Hemlock; 2. Yellow Birch and White Pine are forest components; 3. a perched water table exists; or 4. on a poor quality hardwood site (less competition.) Since they are partially shade tolerant, yet sensitive to excessive sunlight, a woodland that provides approx. 50% canopy cover is ideal. Planting hemlock seedlings with tree protectors, in areas with lower deer densities, or poorer soil (less palatable) offer greater planting latitude and survivability.

How do you obtain the Hemlock?

Contact Dickinson or Marquette Conservation Districts. Hemlock seedlings, (sold as 10-12" tall, 6" deep plugs), are partially funded by DNR Wildlife Division. Hemlocks will arrive in late April and will be distributed from a central location in the U.P. **Price: \$ 0.15 each in quantities of 1000 or more.** The Dickinson and Marquette Conservation Districts currently do not have specific cost share available for planting Hemlock, but local outdoor groups may offer some options. Additionally, potential or current NRCS customers may consider planting Hemlock within contracted tree planting practices as part of the WHIP or EQIP programs. They would also apply to those with DNR Forest Stewardship Plans. Shipping from Ontario (PRT Nursery) is included, but local trucking/pickup TBA.

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