

**October 1, 2007**

Press Release

### URI Receives Nearly \$500,000 to Prevent the Spread of Invasive Species

**WASHINGTON, DC** – In an effort to help protect Rhode Island’s forests and stem the spread of invasive insects, U.S. Senator Jack Reed (D-RI) today announced that the University of Rhode Island will receive a three-year \$499,994 federal grant to research Hemlock Woolly Adelgid (HWA).

The Hemlock Woolly Adelgid is a tiny, non-native insect that kills eastern hemlock trees by feeding on the sap at the base of the hemlock needles, which causes the needles to change from green to gray and eventually kills the tree. The spread of this forest pest has had a harmful impact on ecosystems across Rhode Island and the eastern United States.

Hemlock trees have environmental, economic, and cultural significance in Rhode Island and their loss impacts both the environment and the local economy. According to the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, hemlocks provide a unique ecological component in Rhode Island’s forests that is now threatened by HWA. Hemlock mortality is currently significant in the urban, suburban, and forested landscape of the Ocean State. Persons impacted by HWA include forest landowners, suburban property owners, and the nursery industry in Rhode Island.

“I am pleased the University of Rhode Island is receiving this federal funding to research invasive species and help protect our forest resources. URI is a leader in studying and monitoring invasive species. This federal investment will help URI researchers determine how invasive species like HWA spread across landscapes and develop a better understanding of how to help prevent future infestations,” said Reed, a member of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, and Science (CJS) which oversees federal spending of National Science Foundation programs. “In Rhode Island, our quality of life and economic development correlate directly with the health of our environment and we must find ways to protect it.”

The University of Rhode Island will use the grant, awarded by the National Science Foundation to Dr. Evan Preisser in the College of the Environment and Life Sciences, to research how HWA spreads across the landscape and invades new areas. The project will be conducted using mathematical modeling and genetic analysis combined with experimental work and field surveys.

“Understanding how and why invasive species spread across the landscape will help identify locations most at risk for infestation,” said Preisser. “Such information is essential for protecting the health of hemlock stands in the Ocean State, and we’re glad that the National Science Foundation has provided money for this effort.”

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