

# The Bur

The Newsletter of the Virginia Chapter of  
The American Chestnut Foundation



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## TACF President's Message

The American Chestnut Foundation inaugurated a new president and C.E.O. this year, Lisa Thomson. Lisa will be the keynote speaker at the Virginia Chapter meeting in Galax in October (see p. 3 for details). In the following letter, Lisa shares her impressions of us to date.

Dear Virginia Chapter Friends,

The mission of The American Chestnut Foundation (TACF) is a very long-range pursuit, unusual in this fast-paced world. Our backcross breeding process continues to be an intensive and deliberate endeavor to discover the genes responsible for blight resistance, but our dedicated corps of science staff and field volunteers is building on the visionary work of our founders.

When I began as President and CEO in January, I was quickly astounded by the determination of the volunteers, scientists, and Board of Directors to see this mission through. When TACF was founded in 1983, there were no guarantees that this experiment of breeding a blight-resistant tree would work. But we are making tremendous progress each growing season to bring us closer to our goal: cathedrals of American chestnuts thriving in our eastern forests.

Over the last six months, I have been from Quechee, Vermont, to Gunterville, Alabama, and many parts in between to learn and listen to those who are the lifeblood of our work: TACF's chapter volunteers and committed supporters. I am humbled to lead such an amazing organization with its unique and positive mission.



This is a mission many of us may not see completely fulfilled during our lifetimes. But this does not matter, because doggedly pursuing the restoration of this important, iconic tree is simply the right thing to do.

Dedicated volunteerism is at the very core of TACF's organizational values. Please help spread the word and encourage your friends and neighbors to join us on this positive, hopeful journey of the restoration of the American chestnut.

## Virginia TACF's Breeding Program—The Chapter President's Report

It has been a while since we gave you, our members and supporters, an update on our progress toward the chapter's long term goal of breeding a blight-resistant American chestnut to grow in the Virginia forest. We have made huge progress, but as we move through each step, the next one looms even larger.

The initial mission of the chapter breeding program was to develop 20 lines of blight-resistant trees using the same Chinese source of resistance. The hardiest trees from these 20 lines would then be back-crossed and their nuts planted in seed orchards. The strongest trees in the seed orchards would then be the source of trees to be used in reforestation. The chapter developed its 20 lines so quickly and we found so many healthy, surviving American chestnuts that we started a program to develop another 20 lines using a second Chinese source of blight-resistance. We have pollinated wild, surviving trees from Clarke County all the way south to Montgomery County. Today we have 12 breeding orchards of various ages and 2 orchards where we are growing pure American trees to add to the genetic diversity of our breeding populations.

Today, three or four of our original breeding orchards are approaching the age when they will be inoculated with chestnut blight. After inoculation, the weaker trees will be culled from the orchard and the strong ones left to interbreed. We will know for sure when inoculations will start after we measure the trees at the end of this growing season, but we expect to begin inoculations next summer. We also hope to complete planting our second set of breeding orchards next year. This depends on the fall harvest when we see how many of our cross-pollinated trees were successful parents.

Seed orchards are started the winter after we start culling breeding orchards. We have tentatively identified several sites in the northern Piedmont for seed orchards for the first line of resistance. We will need seed orchard sites for the second line of resistance in about five years. Those seed orchards will be located in the Central Piedmont.

We continue to find wild, surviving American chestnuts in Virginia and it is tempting to breed every single one. But we need to be cautious about taking on more work than our cadre of volunteers can manage. Orchard maintenance is time-consuming and, frankly, a little boring. Inoculation and culling are labor intensive, and we will have at least one orchard to inoculate every year for the next seven or eight years. Nonetheless, we still have no wild survivors in the program from the Valley or Coastal Plain geographic areas of the state: all the pure American trees in the program are (or were) growing in the Piedmont.

I look forward to seeing you in the field. That is the core of what we do and is mission critical.

Cathy Mayes, President, Virginia Chapter



Measuring the height of trees in the Roland Orchard near Marshall

### VA TACF Annual Meeting Scheduled

The Chapter Annual Meeting is set for Saturday, October 31 at 1:30pm. The meeting will take place at the Matthews State Forest headquarters near Galax. Lisa Thomson, TACF CEO and President, will attend and speak at the Annual Meeting.

Although Matthews State Forest is a beautiful site and has a chestnut orchard, it is somewhat isolated and a long drive from northern Virginia. Here are some suggestions for lodging. Galax has a Hampton Inn (<http://hamptoninn3.hilton.com/en/hotels/virginia/hampton-inn-galax-GLXVAHX/index.html>) and one B&B, the Doctors Inn (<http://thedoctorsinnvirginia.com/>). There is the Grayson Inn in Independence ([www.grayson-inn.com](http://www.grayson-inn.com)) and there are several chain motels at the I-77 Route 58 exit.

Program for Annual meeting:

- Treasurer's Report
- Year-in-Review President's Report
- Nominating Committee Report and Election of Directors and Officers
- Science and Education Committee Reports
- Speaker: Lisa Thomson
- Tour of Chestnut Orchard

The Chapter's Board of Directors will be meeting at the same location at 10:00am. The Board Meeting is open to all members.



### Fall Harvest Plans in Northern Virginia

Jack LaMonica has scheduled the harvest for Wednesday, September 23, for the Marshall area. He will meet volunteers at the VA TACF office on Main Street in Marshall at 8:30 am.

The harvest will include the two trees we pollinated near Jack's home off "Pine Needle Road" entrance: 5094 Stable Field Road, Marshall, Virginia, but may also include three trees at home of Michael Granruth, 9585 Ada Road, and his neighbor, pollinated by others on a second day.



Harvest takes less than half the time of pollinations, so we should have enough time to complete all trees in less time than it took to pollinate just two.

Another tree in Waterford will be harvested on Thursday September 24. Then we will harvest a tree near New Market and at SCBI (Front Royal) on Friday, September 25, for which we will need several volunteers with poles and ladders (SCBI has all low trees).

#### Get VATACF News!

Back issues of *The Bur* are available online at [vachestnut.org](http://vachestnut.org).

## 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Chestnut Restoration Celebration at Meadowview Research Laboratory

Learn about the restoration of the American chestnut and enjoy an afternoon of food, live music, and family fun. The Southwest Virginia Branch of the American Chestnut Foundation® (TACF) will hold the 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Restoration Celebration on Saturday, October 17, 2015 from 2:00-6:00 p.m. at the Glenn C. Price Research Laboratory, in Meadowview, VA.

Events include:

**Farm Tour** –Tours of the Glenn C. Price Research Farm starting at 2:30 p.m. After the orchard tours, visitors can also tour the lab where advanced genetic research is being conducted and learn about volunteer opportunities. A variety of activities for kids will also be included.

**Chestnut Drop** – Numbered chestnuts will be dropped from the Farm’s cherry picker and the person’s number matching the number on the nut closest to the center of the target will win a pair of Restoration 1.0 Chestnut seedlings.



Plenty of activities for children at the Celebration!

**Chestnut Roast and Beer** – The event will feature roasted chestnuts, light snacks with a chestnut theme, and locally

## STEM Academy Teaches Students

A story as interesting as the American chestnut tree’s deserves to be shared with people of all ages. This past summer, The American Chestnut Foundation’s Virginia chapter had the opportunity to assist Harrisonburg High School Governor’s STEM Academy students with American chestnut education. STEM Academy is a five day educational program that allows high school students to learn about various scientific topics. This year’s batch of rising sophomores used West Virginia’s Green Bank Telescope to observe and map the Milky Way Galaxy, studied salamanders in Shenandoah National Park, and participated in American chestnut transect counts and orchard observations.

Campers were given reading material detailing the American chestnut tree and its history before conducting a mile-long chestnut count on Skyline Drive’s Meadow Spring trail. The students also measured some of the trail’s larger surviving trees and discussed their important role in The American Chestnut Foundation’s breeding program.

After an exciting night of camping, the group headed to the Blandy Experimental Farm in Boyce, Virginia, where TACF intern Jacob Winn explained to them the backcrossing method and provided instruction on collecting basic data in an orchard setting. The students then conducted a walk-through observation in TACF’s “Blandy A” breeding orchard. The Virginia Chapter of The American Chestnut Foundation is grateful to have aided in teaching these bright young students about the American chestnut tree for the first time.



### **Meadowview In-Service Training Program**

For four years the Southwest Virginia Restoration Branch of Meadowview has hosted a summertime in-service program for area teachers. From humble beginnings, when attended by gym teachers fulfilling a requirement, the training now almost exclusively draws math, science and horticulture educators eager to incorporate the chestnut story into their curriculum. While recruitment from local Washington County has been successful and tireless efforts to garner participation from adjacent counties have begun to bear fruit, recruitment of participants from areas beyond remains challenging.

That changed this spring when a chance conversation with a Grayson County teacher led to a simple e-mail introduction to Scott Jackson-Ricketts, Program Director at the Blue Ridge Discovery Center. That one mail sparked a flurry of activity and within days the concept of a traveling in-service program was in full development.

To replicate the Meadowview in-service program some substantial changes would be necessary. The chestnut orchard at Matthews State Forest would substitute for the popular Meadowview orchard tour and a series of hands on activities would be expanded in an attempt to replace the Meadowview lab tour training component.

Using the Meadowview program as a model, the agenda for Matthews, developed through close cooperation between Matt Brinckman, a Regional Science Coordinator for TACF, Scott Jackson-Ricketts of the Blue Ridge Discovery Center, Zach Olinger from the Virginia Department of Forestry and Doug and Stacey Levin of the Southwest Virginia Restoration Branch, divided the training day into short sessions designed to both educate and keep the participants engaged. Teachers from five different area schools participated and

through the generosity of Matthews State Forest, as arranged by Zach Olinger, each school represented received a TACF Learning Box at the end of the day. The SWVA Branch donated an additional Learning Box for use by Matthews State Forest and the Blue Ridge Discovery Center.

While focused on the chestnut story, the group also learned about the history and valuable work of the Blue Ridge Discovery Center and enjoyed an afternoon nature hike in Matthews State Forest, where topics ranged from bird and plant identification to forest succession.

The teacher feedback was overwhelmingly positive, most notably about activity stations where smaller participant groups examined chestnut wood, leaf and bur samples, practiced the steps of inoculation and answered questions based on Learning Box activities. To keep everyone involved, active and awake after a hearty catered lunch, the groups moved from station to station every 20 minutes.

Scott Jackson-Ricketts summarizes, "I have been to a number of teaching/training workshops over the last 10 years, but in terms of efficiency and ease of information transfer, this ranks very high on the list... and the take-away will have a lasting effect." We could not have asked for more.

### **Learning Box Grant Received**

TACF acquired a grant from an anonymous donor to purchase four learning boxes to be donated to the Virginia Master Naturalists (VMN) program. To help ensure that the learning boxes are utilized by VMN volunteers, trainings will be held at three of their four regional conferences this fall (Southwest (9/26), Northern (9/27), and Central (8/29)). The grant also

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helps pay for travel expenses and training supplies for the trainings. After the trainings the boxes will be given to VMN and they will locate them across the state in locations convenient to their chapters that will utilize them. The anticipation is that the boxes will not only be used to educate new and current VMN volunteers but also so that VMN volunteers can take them to outreach events to extend the learning box experience to others.

### Southwest VA Branch Student Projects

The Southwest Virginia Branch of TACF is always excited about student projects that deal with the chestnut story. It is a great opportunity for classmates, teachers, family members, and even judges to learn about the restoration of the American chestnut tree. Last year we had two winning student projects on display at the teacher in-service training. The middle school students came to show and discuss their projects. One project won at the state level and placed at the National competition. Their sponsor, who had attended an earlier teacher in-service, encouraged the students, brought them to the farm to help them in their collection of data and was herself nominated for a \$25,000 Mcglothlin teacher award..

Our 2015 in-service had another student project presented by Isabelle Phillips, whose 4-H project won at her school, her local 4-H group, and was a District 4-H Champion in the Forestry division. Isabelle was a 4<sup>th</sup> grader when she won. Her Dad is Curtis Phillips, who works at the TACF research farm in Meadowview. Isabelle was able to come to the farm with her Dad one day and help take nuts from the sticky burs. She became interested in the chestnut story and often quizzed her Dad about what he was working on at the

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brewed chestnut beer provided by The Damascus Brewery.

**Raffle and Door Prizes** – Merchandise contributed by local merchants will be raffled and door prizes will be presented.

### Contact:

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farm. No shyness was in evidence when she presented her project at the teacher in-service to the 12 teachers and staff and volunteers in the room. She had burs from the learning box and the inoculation and blight stems along with a poster she had made. She talked about the blight and how it destroyed the trees and how the work in



the lab is helping to bring the American chestnut back to our forests. We are proud of the work that Isabelle did.

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**Fall Calendar of Events**

- September 21 Harvest – Meadowview Farms. Meet at Hawthorne Dr. entrance at 9:00
- September 23 Harvest — Marshall. Meet at VATACF office at 8:30
- September 24 Harvest — Waterford
- September 25 Harvest — New Market
- September 25-26 Harvest — Catawba
- September 27 Harvest – Meadowview Farms
- October 3 Bur Opening and Open House — Marshall
- October 17 Chestnut Restoration Celebration – Glenn C. Price Research Farm, 29010 Hawthorne Drive, Meadowview. 2:00-5:00
- October 23-24 TACF Annual Meeting – State College, PA
- October 25 Celebrate Trails! Festival – Municipal Parking lot at 5th and Franklin Streets, Warrenton. 12:00-4:00
- October 31 Board of Directors Meeting – Matthews State Forest headquarters, 106 Forest Lane, Galax. Meeting starts at 10:00.
- October 31 Annual Membership Meeting – Matthews State Forest headquarters. Meeting starts at 1:30. Keynote speaker: Lisa Thomson, President and CEO of The American Chestnut Foundation. Tour of chestnut seed orchard following.



Setting Asian ambrosia beetle traps



Volunteer measures the girth of a chestnut tree

### Matt Brinckman Receives Alumnus Award

Matthew Brinckman, recipient of a 2008 B.S. and a 2010 M.S. in forestry from Virginia Tech received this year's Outstanding Recent Alumnus Award – Graduate Degree in recognition of his early career accomplishments. He is currently the mid-Atlantic regional science coordinator for The American Chestnut Foundation and provides assistance to the Virginia Chapter's efforts to restore the American chestnut to our forests.

Since graduating, Brinckman has made remarkable strides worthy of recognition. He first joined the Department of Forest Resources and Environmental Conservation as an Extension project associate. Among his many accomplishments, he carried out a statewide project focused on reducing the barriers to participation in forest certification among private forest landowners. His leadership in the formative stages of the project led to an additional \$50,000 in funding to build on his achievements.



Brinckman joined the American Chestnut Foundation in 2012 and has been blazing a trail of success ever since. He is a leader in the organization, having taken several projects under his wing, and is critical to the success of efforts to repopulate eastern forests with healthy and viable chestnut trees.



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