

The Bur

The Newsletter of the Virginia Chapter of
The American Chestnut Foundation



Spring 2013

Vol. 6, No. 1

2013 Starts at Beliveau Estate

By Carl Absher

My dad bought the only property he ever owned in the late 40's and built his house in 1950. But before he built the house, he built a barn to house a few cows. The barn was about 300 yards from the house. Dad wanted a tall pole with a light on it to illuminate our way from the house to the barn since we often started chores before daylight or finished them after dark. Money was scarce but I remember Dad saying that we could go down to Uncle Creed's, which was his homeplace, and get a chestnut pole out of the mountains. We did just that and I remember the pole being very straight and at least 16' long. It was about the size of a gate post at the base and already without bark. I don't think we had to cut it down—I think we just found it fallen in the woods. I remember Dad telling me that he wanted chestnut because it would last for years and it would be straight. . . . The pole is gone but the virtues of the chestnut tree that Dad extolled stayed with me. . . .”

“Can you imagine the conversations our dads would have had if they could have heard Betty Hahn's presentation at the first Roanoke Valley Restoration Branch event at Beliveau Estate Win-

ery on February 2nd? I'm sure they would be pleased with what TACF is doing.”



Betty Hahn spoke about the cultural importance of the American chestnut

There seems to be nothing like the American chestnut that inspires nostalgia. Dr. Curtis Absher, retired from the University of Kentucky, relayed the previous

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The President's Message

I wish all associated with our foundation a happy, productive and healthy 2013. We are looking forward to another active growing season.

Starting with the completion of one line from the Virginia Chapter's first pollinations and harvest in 2007, we have now exceeded our initial goal of establishing 20 lines of tree genetics in breeding orchards. We hope to add another 20 lines using a new source of resistance to the blight. These lines will contribute greatly to the diversity necessary to insure successful restoration of this vital source of food, timber, and habitat in our forests. None of this would have been possible without the support of dedicated staff, selfless volunteers, and generous donors.

Our volunteers have also dedicated themselves to the education and outreach programs. Learning boxes have been created to teach the chestnut story to a new generation. This is critical, especially given the dwindling number of eyewitnesses to the blight in the first half of the 20th century. It is truly one of the top, if not the greatest, man-made environmental disasters in our country's history.

We sincerely appreciate your past support and ask you to participate in any way you can. We hope to see you soon at one of our upcoming events. Please visit our website at <http://vachestnut.org>.

Gratefully yours,
Jack LaMonica



"Study nature, love nature, stay close to nature. It will never let you down."

Frank Lloyd Wright.

Planting Help Needed

VATACF will be planting orchards in four locations this spring and we encourage people to let us know if they want to help. The locations are Boston, Crozet, The Plains and Catawba. For information, and to volunteer, write vachestnut@verizon.net or call (540) 364-1922.

story to me after the event. He came all the way from Nicholasville, Kentucky, to join about 70 other chestnut enthusiasts on the snowy evening. The mountain to which he refers in the story is almost right at the front door of the winery and a 12-inch survivor is one of the trees we pollinated last June to start our breeding orchard. Who knows? Perhaps the pole that Curtis and his Dad gathered came from the same giant tree that left the old stump that continues to send up the new trees.

The event was the first for the fledgling Roanoke Valley Restoration Branch. We cannot thank Beliveau Estate enough for their help. During the social hour, the Great Hall was filled with great food and wine and music by *County Connection*.

The featured speaker, Betty Hahn, is an Instructor in Religion and Culture at Virginia Tech. She began her presentation with the documentary film *American Chestnut: American Apocalypse*. Her comments on the oral history of the film went beyond the loss of the timber and nuts and explored the cultural issues and stereotypes of the Appalachian people that persist today. Matt Brinckman, Regional Science Coordinator for The American Chestnut Foundation, gave a short history of chestnut blight and reviewed the local efforts to develop a blight-resistant tree. Hahn concluded the meeting with the *Smart Mouth String Band* playing her original song, “*Let’s go Walking in the Chestnut Trees*,” a cool little ditty that brought a standing ovation.

We invite readers who live in the Roanoke-Blacksburg region to join the Restoration Branch by contacting me or the state office.



The County Connection made merry for 70-plus guests

2013 Spring–Summer Activities

March 14	Measuring trees at Blandy farm
March 16	Planting Restoration Chestnuts in Jefferson National Forest
March-TBD	Measuring trees at Big Island and Thompson Tree Farm in Floyd
March-TBD	Planting 3 orchards: Fauquier County; The Ranch, Boston; Fried Farm, Crozet
March 23-24	Chapter Board meeting and Meadowview Farms Tour
March/April-TBD	Orchard steward training – Charlottesville area
May 9	Strategic Planning Meeting
May 17	MEGA Transect training – Damascus
After May 25	Pollination leader training – Charlottesville and Marshall areas
June-TBD	Pollination– Charlottesville, Marshall and Blacksburg areas
June-TBD	MEGA Transect training – Northern Virginia
Summer-TBD	Teacher in-service training on American chestnut history and restoration

Get VA-TACF News

An edition of *The Bur* is available on-line at vachestnut.org.

Southwest Branch Plans Progeny Test Plantings

Dick Olson, SWVA Restoration Branch

Twenty-nine Southwest Virginia Restoration Branch volunteers assisted planting chestnuts on reclaimed surface mines in 2012 in Dickenson and Wise Counties as part of the Appalachian Region Reforestation Initiative (ARRI) program which was funded by the U.S. Forest Service through the Virginia Department of Forestry. We will plant Restoration Chestnuts 1.0 at another Dickenson county site on March 2, 2013, under a Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) to TACF from the Natural Resources Conservation Service to establish forest plantings on 12 reclaimed surface mine sites in Appalachia. The Virginia Department of Forestry, Green Forests Work, ARRI and TACF scientists have teamed up with mine operators to evaluate planting protocols and techniques needed for when TACF's disease-resistant chestnuts will be available in mass quantities for planting on more reclaimed mines. The Branch will monitor these plantings into the future.

The Branch is planning its first planting of Restoration Chestnuts 1.0 in a natural setting in our area, preparing for future widespread restoration plantings. Our objective is to establish a stand of potentially blight-resistant chestnuts as a demonstration stand to educate the public as to the significance of this tree. The stand will aid in the continued selection of blight resistant chestnuts that will be planted throughout the region. The site is near the Grindstone Campground in the Mount Rogers area of the Jefferson National Forest. The spring planting is scheduled for Saturday, March 16, 2013.

Other planned Branch activities planned for 2013 include:

- April 12-14, 2013. *Mid Atlantic Garden Faire*, SW Virginia Higher Ed Center, Abingdon, the Branch will sponsor an information booth and hold a raffle for potentially blight-resistant Restoration Chestnuts.
- April 27, 2013, Saturday 10 a.m. to noon. *Rain Barrel Workshop* at the Meadowview Price Farm, make a rain barrel and learn about rain gardens and chestnuts. Preregister by calling the Upper Tennessee River Roundtable at (276) 628-1600.
- May 17, 2013, Friday 10 a.m. to noon with field trip 1:00-3:00 p.m. *Training on identifying American chestnuts* along the Appalachian Trail as part of the MEGA-Transect project presented as part of Trail Days in Damascus, VA. The Southwest Virginia Restoration Branch will have an information booth as part of Trail Days.
- Early summer (Date to be determined). **Teacher In-service Training** teachers learn the chestnut story and how to use the Chestnut Learning Box

The goal of the Branch is to expand the planting of Restoration Chestnuts in Southwest Virginia. For more information email us at swvabranch@acf.org or call TACF's Meadowview Price Research Farms at 276-944-4631.

SW Branch Volunteers to Assemble New Learning Boxes for TACF

By Kathy Marmet

A group of Southwest Virginia Restoration Branch volunteers has signed on to play a key role in distributing Version 2 of The American Chestnut Foundation's



Participants in a teacher in-service training organized by volunteers of the Southwest Virginia Restoration Branch use materials from TACF's American Chestnut Learning Box in a hands-on activity led by Mila Kirkland and Thomas Saielli.

American Chestnut Learning Box. The new version is due to be released this month.

The *American Chestnut Learning Box* is a collection of printed materials and physical objects for use in a variety of learning environments that offer a hands-on learning experience. It has been developed by the Education Committee of TACF's Development Cabinet, with the first version distributed to each of TACF's state chapters and regional science staff at the fall Annual Meeting in 2010. It includes nuts, burs and leaves from chestnut and other trees, a chestnut "tree cookie," blocks of five different types of wood, and chestnut tree sections showing inoculation sites and chestnut blight. Explanatory pages keyed to each of these samples are included in a binder. In addition to these hands-on items, many resources for teaching about the American chestnut are included either in printed form or on accompanying compact disks.

Tommie Pratt, who lives near the TACF Research Farms at Meadowview, is coordinating the efforts of volunteers from the Southwest Virginia Restoration branch. The volunteers are working closely with Jeff Donahue and other TACF staff at TACF's Meadowview, Virginia Research Farms to develop a process for tracking and maintaining component materials, monitoring quality and assembling components into completed learning boxes, as well as shipping the final product to purchasers.

The education group of the Southwest Virginia Restoration Branch includes Myra Orr, Nancy Hagen, and Craig Ashbrook. They have been active since formation of the Branch in 2010. Last year these volunteers organized a day of teacher in-service training at the TACF Research Farms. The event gave the 10 participating teachers an opportunity to tour the farms and the new TACF laboratory with TACF's staff scientists Fred Hebard, and Laura Georgi. They also participated in a hands-on session using the American Chestnut Learning Box presented by Mila Kirkland of TACF's Asheville headquarters, and Southern Regional Science Coordinator Thomas Saielli.

TACF intern Zach Starsia of Charlottesville has worked on preparing and inventorying biological materials for the learning box, along with helping Virginia's Regional Science Coordinator Matt Brinckman with breeding program work. He is also drafting a handbook for assembly of all components of the learning box, and will travel to Meadowview within the next month to deliver materials and provide support to the volunteers and staff who are assuming responsibility for learning box materials and assembly.

Plan to Participate in VA Strategic Planning May 9

By Kathy Marmet

The Directors of the Virginia Chapter invite supporters, members and potential partners to participate in a strategic planning process on May 9th in Charlottesville. Active volunteers are especially urged to plan to attend. Your voice will be heard on the key steps the Virginia Chapter will take in the next few years. As a participant, you will be in on the ground floor, shaping the Virginia Chapter's direction, and will have an opportunity to be a key player in moving forward toward restoration of American chestnut in Virginia's forests.

Last fall, the TACF Board of Directors adopted TACF's Restoration Plan. The Restoration Plan sets out current understandings of the path forward to accomplish TACF's Mission:

To restore the American chestnut tree to our eastern woodlands to benefit our environment, our wildlife, and our society.

The Restoration Plan represents years of work by many of TACF's professional scientists and volunteers. This plan includes goals and objectives for the organization on a national level, as well as for TACF's state chapters. The Virginia Chapter planning process will chart our state's path for the next five years toward meeting these goals and objectives, including looking ahead to establishment of Virginia's first seed orchard.

The May 9th session will be an op-

portunity to learn about the TACF Restoration Plan as it relates to the Virginia effort and to participate in important decisions about the Virginia Chapter program. The process is being led by an experienced facilitator who is donating her time to make this a very productive meeting. Details and advance briefing materials will be posted on the website at: vachestnut.org and will be emailed to all subscribers to the chapter listserv (sign up at <http://mrsgale.fates.org/mailman/listinfo/vatacf>).

If you have questions or would like to help, please contact Matt Brinckman (matt@acf.org) or Kathy Marmet (kathymarmet@gmail.com).

Spring Board Meeting at Meadowview

The spring Board of Directors meeting of the Virginia Chapter will be held March 23-24, 2013. The Board will tour the Glenn Price Research Farm at Meadowview on Saturday afternoon with the formal meeting on Sunday morning.

The Board meeting will start at 9:00 am Sunday at the at the Southwest Virginia 4-H center at 25236 Hillman Highway, Abingdon, VA 24210, The agenda will include a review of Operation GROW Program, with Bryan Burhans and Ginny Kruntorad available for questions and input. Board members are reading Ultimate Board Member's Handbook by Kay Grace to prepare for the meeting. The Board will formally decide whether or not to commit to Operation GROW, which would involve review of Chapter governance and strategic planning for chapter operations. The Board will also review spring planting/pollination plans, yearly

budget, plans for the Strategic Planning Workshop to be held on May 9, and other activities for 2013.

Virginia Chapter Board meetings are open to all members of the Virginia Chapter of The American Chestnut Foundation.

Bull Run Mountains Chestnut Survival Study Yields First Results

By Cathy Mayes

Last winter, VA TACF launched a multi-year study in partnership with Smithsonian Institution and Bull Run Mountains Conservancy to test the influence of light and deer browse on American chestnut (*Castanea dentata*) seedling growth and survival. The Bull Run Mountains form the easternmost ridge of the Blue Ridge, lying on the border of Prince William and Fauquier Counties and protected by the Virginia Outdoors Foundation. Chestnut was once a dominant tree on Bull Run Mountains, and the mountains will someday be a site for chestnut reforestation. But the forest has changed since the Asian chestnut blight (*Cryphonectria parasitica*) denuded them. The most obvious change is an explosion of the population of white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*). This study will help us learn how best to reintroduce the species in this changed world.

Initially, 1200 American chestnut seeds were planted in 150 sites. Seeds were assigned to one of three treatments (control, individual fence or slash pile) to protect them from deer browse. Half the planting sites are in canopy gaps created by removing shrubs and saplings. In control sites, no thinning of the understory



Jackson Hollow, Bull Run Mountains
© Gary P. Fleming

occurred. Three reconnaissance cameras were placed among the sites to capture nighttime activity.

Site monitoring began in mid-March. It was immediately obvious that small mammals, especially grey squirrels (*Sciurus carolinensis*), had discovered our chestnuts. Approximately 60% of the sites were replanted at least once, yet only about 20% of the nuts survived after six weeks, including those that had been replanted, and only 5.5% survived until fall. As one volunteer said, “We fed those squirrels one chestnut at a time.” One exception is a boulder field: It had a 30% survival rate.

Undaunted, in May, volunteers planted 96 chestnut seedlings in sites where there had been heavy nut predation. Seedlings had a much better survival rate, little surprise, with 78% still alive in October. To continue the study with an adequate number of experimental units, another 384 seedlings were planted in November.

By the end of the first growing season, some significant differences could be seen in seedling height among planting treatments. These differences suggest that deer browse is discouraged by slash and fences. This coming season, with a larger number of planted seedlings, we expect to strengthen our results.

Volunteer Profile:

Joseph Orr and Monica Lotzgesell

We have Joseph Orr and Monica Lotzgesell to thank for our fabulous new Web site, vachestnut.org. Monica hails from a family of scientists with land in Boston, Virginia, so grew up with a connection to nature and the ethic of being a good land steward. Monica met Joseph when they were working in marketing in South Carolina. The couple moved to Washington for broader professional opportunities at the same time Monica's family planted a chestnut breeding orchard on their Boston property. Joseph started building Web sites as a teen, and by his sophomore year in college had set up a consulting business, Joseph Orr and Associates. Today the business provides both consulting and implementation assistance for integrated marketing, brand



communications and, of course, Web applications. They particularly like working with clients in the non-profit sector. Combine Monica's interest in nature, Joseph's experience with computers and their combined eyes for marketing, and the Virginia chapter has a beautiful, useful new Web site. Thank you, Monica and Joseph.



THE
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FOUNDATION®

Virginia Chapter

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