
Virginia Chapter of The American Chestnut Foundation Strategic Plan 2013-202 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

"Where there are mountains there are chestnuts." --The Gentleman of Elvas, *True Relation of the Hardships Suffered by Governor Hernando de Soto...*, 1540¹

Mission:

The mission of THE AMERICAN CHESTNUT FOUNDATION (TACF) is to restore the American chestnut tree to our eastern woodlands to benefit our environment, our wildlife, and our society. The American Chestnut Foundation is restoring a species--and in the process, creating a template for restoration of other tree and plant species.

The VIRGINIA CHAPTER OF THE AMERICAN CHESTNUT FOUNDATION (VATACF) was formed in 2006 to implement the mission of TACF in Virginia.

Why Save the American Chestnut?

The American chestnut was both the largest and most plentiful tree in the Appalachian forest before being virtually eliminated from the forest canopy in the first half of the Twentieth Century by a fungal blight inadvertently imported on Asian nursery stock. The mighty American chestnut was a keystone of both the human economy and the ecology of the Appalachian forest. The death of billions of trees throughout the region was one of the major ecological disasters of modern times.

The American chestnut is a rapidly growing timber tree. Mature American chestnuts frequently measured four feet in diameter and were more than one hundred feet tall. Some grew much larger, earning the nickname "Sequoia of the East". American chestnut produces high quality wood that is straight-grained, strong yet relatively light-weight for a hardwood, and highly rot resistant. It is drought

¹ Quoted in *Where There Are Mountains: An Environmental History of the Southern Appalachians*, Donald Edward Davis (2000, University of Georgia Press)

tolerant and grows well on difficult sites such as abandoned mine land. Chestnut is a reliable producer of nutritious nuts that sustain a variety of forest wildlife.

Current technologies and understandings of genetics, along with the determination and dedication of The American Chestnut Foundation's scientists and volunteers, who have labored for thirty years to carry out a six generation breeding process, bring the prospect of returning this forest giant to its place in the Eastern forest.

Virginia is near the center of the historic range of the American chestnut. The chestnut blight swept through our Commonwealth roughly ninety years ago. Few who remember this magnificent tree still walk the earth. Fortunately, the story of the American chestnut has been kept alive, allowing us to play our part as members of the Virginia Chapter of The American Chestnut Foundation so that future generations will know and benefit from this mighty giant of a tree.

How Will We Restore the American Chestnut?

For thirty years, The American Chestnut Foundation has carried out a six generation plan of backcross breeding designed to instill blight resistance from Asian chestnut into trees that are otherwise characteristic of the American chestnut. Test plantings of the resulting 15/16 American chestnut seed, known as Restoration American Chestnut 1.0 were begun in 2008.

The Virginia Chapter began its breeding program, uses surviving Virginia mother trees to advance the genetic diversity of the national program and to ensure regional adaptability of the resulting restoration population to the native range in Virginia. Other scientific approaches, including use of advanced genetic technology and addressing other interrelated organisms are also being pursued.

The challenge of reintroducing the American chestnut to the Eastern forest lies ahead and inspires us to plan for an organization that is prepared to grow and adapt to the challenges of the future.

The Virginia Chapter of The American Chestnut Foundation

The Virginia Chapter adopted a seven year Strategic Plan at its first annual meeting ([2006 Strategic Plan](#)). While its major goals remain unchanged, most of the ambitious objectives of that plan have been met, as the Chapter has moved rapidly forward in carrying out the breeding program, educating the public and preparing for the future. A summary of accomplishments is included in the current Strategic Plan.

Goals of the Virginia Chapter of The American Chestnut Foundation

- 1. Develop blight-resistant chestnuts that are adapted to the geographic regions of Virginia*
 - 2. Educate the public about the values of American chestnut and efforts to develop blight resistance*
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3. Prepare for reintroduction of American chestnut trees in Virginia

Goal 1: Develop blight-resistant chestnuts that are adapted to the geographic regions of Virginia

- a) Provide high quality care for existing backcross orchards sufficient to advance the lines planted in them to production of seed for seed orchards
- b) Carry out controlled pollinations and orchard plantings to complete 20 lines of the Nanking source of resistance
- c) Establish and provide care for at least one additional pure American mother tree orchard
- d) Prepare for establishment of seed orchards including inoculations and rogueing in backcross orchards
- e) Provide support for national level plantings within the Commonwealth.
- f) Create organizational and training infrastructure to support all plantings.

Goal 2: Educate the public about the values of American chestnut and efforts to develop blight resistance

- a) Increase awareness of existing educational resources and develop new resources using video and electronic media
- b) Expand cadre of speakers to give presentations to various types of groups
- c) Partner with Master Naturalists and other groups to expand educational program, especially for schools
- d) Develop chestnut growing kits to provide hands on growing experiences
- e) Promote citizen science in a more systematic way, defining roles, providing training and matching volunteers with tasks, ideally managed online.
- f) Increase exposure and spread vision.
 - a. Social media, including crowd sourcing (ex. kick-starter)
 - b. Outreach events at orchards
 - c. Outreach to schools to build future support.
- g) Promote teaching and funding of biology and botany and promote chestnut education within funded programs, such as STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics)
- h) Adapt FOREST Training to engage non-academic professionals as well as potential volunteers, targeting it to specific audiences and VATAF needs and looking at ways to make it more field based

Goal 3: Prepare for reintroduction of American chestnut trees in Virginia

- a) Establish six new Restoration Branches in areas targeted to meet breeding program or other strategic needs
- b) Identify and develop potential partnerships and partnership projects with groups with shared interests

- c) Participate in TACF membership initiative and coordinate with national plans for membership contacts and membership data -- increase membership by 10%
- d) Adopt proven best practices for working with volunteers
- e) Establish a process for annual rewards to recognize volunteers and partners based on hours and/or years of service
- f) Develop a communication infrastructure with structured and defined roles to clarify lines of communication and adapt to the increased complexity of communication
- g) Develop a communication toolbox
- h) Research the unique community of organisms connected to American chestnut in both orchard and forest settings,
- i) Create a list of VA professionals in fields related to American chestnut history and restoration to promote collaboration and to develop cross-disciplinary connections for silviculture and ecosystem research.
- j) Document needs for additional administrative and science support to carry out planned program
- k) Improve communication of needs to community of supporters
- l) Solicit ideas from major supporters
- m) Strengthen donor stewardship process in coordination with TACF
- n) Use various fundraising approaches:
 - a. Tap cost-free resources.
 - b. Entrepreneurial approaches.
- o) Improve interaction with target market. Increasing membership interaction to better leverage support

Budget Requirements
