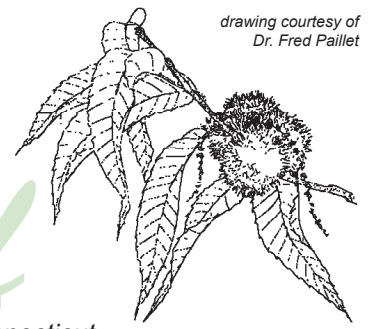


News from the Connecticut Chapter of The American Chestnut Foundation

Winter/Spring 2025

the New Leaf

Our mission is restoration of the American chestnut in the State of Connecticut



President's Letter



CT-TACF Chapter President Jack Swatt opening a slash wall gate during the American Chestnut Symposium in Cromwell, CT on Oct 23, 2024. Photo by Kendra Collins

What a difference a year makes. Last year at this time, we had just learned about the problems that our research partners had encountered with the Darling 58 transgenic chestnut tree. After years of anticipating its deregulation and our potential to use pollen from the program to cross with the trees in our Backcross and Germplasm Conservation orchards, we were all left disheartened and questioning where we would go from there. Despite the lack of hope with the Darling line, there are other transgenic lines being developed at SUNY-ESF and other research labs, but it will take considerably longer before these lines will be ready for a petition for deregulation. In the meantime, the first Germplasm Conservation Orchards that we planted in 2020 started showing evidence of flowering this year. As

the trees in these orchards continue to grow, we will have ample sources of germplasm to cross with transgenic pollen once those future lines have been developed and thoroughly tested.

Even before this event, our science staff was continuing to work with the Backcross Breeding Program to enhance it. The original plan, with open pollinated seed orchards, had not lived up to its promise. The yield from the first seed orchards had less than expected blight tolerance in the nuts that were being produced. Even though overall blight tolerance was less than that found in 50% American Chinese hybrid trees, there were still many trees in our program, exhibiting a high level of resistance. Since genetic testing has become more advanced, and less expensive, we have been able to

genetically test the trees being selected for blight resistance. Most of these trees had a much higher percentage of Chinese chestnut genes than the 5% predicted in the original backcross plan. By continuing to breed the best trees with other best trees, our scientist predict that we can achieve better blight tolerance, and still retain American characteristics, even though the trees may retain a higher percentage of Chinese genes.

As the overall plan to achieve a blight tolerant, American chestnut has gone through some changes, the work for our Connecticut chapter has remained the same. We continue to find new sources of wild American germplasm to plant in our ever-increasing number of Germplasm Conservation Orchards. Our backcross orchards are only halfway through the blight challenge and selection process, and we still have some potential trees to use in the Best X Best crossing program (now being called Recurrent Genomic Selection). We will continue to plant nuts from some of our better backcrossed trees in our Seed Orchards to hopefully find more trees with better light resistance. The new direction our backcross program is taking will also offer our chapter the opportunity to plant some of these Best X Best crosses in new test orchards. As long as we continue to find chestnuts, plant trees and continue to study them, we will still be moving forward towards achieving our goal of producing an American Chestnut tree that can survive in the forests of the future.

Jack Swatt

President, CT-TACF

Tribute to John C. Baker



John enjoying his time and work with the chestnuts in our orchards. - Photo by Bill Adamsen

The CT Chapter lost a dedicated chestnut orchard manager, board member and friend to all in September, when John Baker passed away after a brief illness. John's professional life was mostly spent abroad, but when he returned to CT and settled down in Litchfield, he devoted his time to conservation. As a member of the Litchfield Hills Audubon Society, he spearheaded efforts to plant a Backcross Orchard on one of their properties and helped pollinate local American chestnuts to fill it. John was a board member of our chapter for 15 years and served as the chairman of our Nominations Committee. He will truly be missed by our members and those of the other organizations he worked with. 🍂



John Baker at the Milton Resolution Day Road Race, a race he organized for more than 15 years held every New Year's Day in his neighborhood, with the starting line at the bottom of his driveway. Just another of his many interests! - Photo by John McKenna

Farewell and thank you for all, Kendra!



Kendra at the CAES chestnut orchard in Hamden CT, playing with the leftover liquid-nitrogen used to collect and flash freeze young leaf samples for the Chinese Chestnut genome project - Photo by Jack Swatt

It is with mixed emotions that we announce the departure of Kendra Collins, Director of Regional Program and New England Regional Science Coordinator from The American Chestnut Foundation. After almost 17 remarkable years of dedication to our chestnut mission!

Kendra's chestnut journey began nearly 20 years ago during her time at the University of Vermont, where an American chestnut research project sparked her lifelong passion. Her

enthusiasm led her to become a founding board member of the VT/ NH Chapter. Shortly after graduation, Kendra's path crossed with TACF's then-CEO, Marshal Case, leading to an unexpected and seamless integration into TACF's family. She accepted her position without hesitation and has made unprecedented contributions ever since.

Throughout her tenure, Kendra's zeal for the mission and connection with the community have been paramount.

She has played an instrumental role in shaping TACF's science plan, fostering regional team development, and building invaluable partnerships. Her impact on the team and the broader network of forest researchers and practitioners is profound and lasting.

To Kendra, every volunteer in the many chapters have always been the heartbeat of TACF. She cherishes the friendships and the spirit of generosity and optimism that they all embody. While Kendra is stepping away from her official role, she remains committed to the VT/NH Chapter and hopes this transition is merely a "see you later" rather than a "goodbye". Kendra welcomes you to reach out, stay in touch, and should you find yourself in northern Vermont, Kendra hopes to connect and catch up!

Kendra, on behalf of everyone at the Connecticut chapter, it has been an absolute honor and privilege to have had your unwavering support and service over these years. We deeply appreciate all you have done and for being the remarkable person you are.

With heartfelt gratitude and best wishes for the future! 🍎

Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station Win TACF Partner Award



We are thrilled to announce that the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station and Lockwood Farm have been honored with the TACF Partnership Award for 2024. This recognition celebrates their outstanding support and contributions to TACF's Connecticut Chapter and National Office through unwavering commitment to science, education, and

outreach.

The success of the Connecticut Chapter and the overarching goals of the National Office would not have been possible without the diligent efforts of the team at Lockwood Farm. Special recognition is due to Richard Cecarelli, Research Farm Manager, and Susanna Kerio, Assistant Scientist at the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station. Their instrumental roles and tireless work have been pivotal in achieving this honor.

We are also immensely grateful for their invaluable assistance in planning

the highly successful 2024 TACF National Symposium held in Cromwell and for hosting insightful tours of Lockwood Farm. This collaborative spirit has been vital to our shared mission and accomplishments.

On behalf of the CT Chapter of TACF, we extend heartfelt congratulations and deep appreciation for many years of fruitful collaboration. We look forward to continuing this strong partnership in the years to come.

Thank you, Richard and Susanna, and the entire team for your dedication and excellence! 🍎

Student Presentations at 2024 Chestnut Symposium

By Lindsay Rush



Alina, Josh, and Lindsay during the American Chestnut Symposium poster session in Cromwell, October 2024

In October 2024, Joshua Hays and Alina Tran, students from Southern Connecticut State University, presented the findings from their summer research project in a poster and flash talk at the American Chestnut Symposium in Cromwell, CT. Their project, “Cost-Effective Pollination Method for

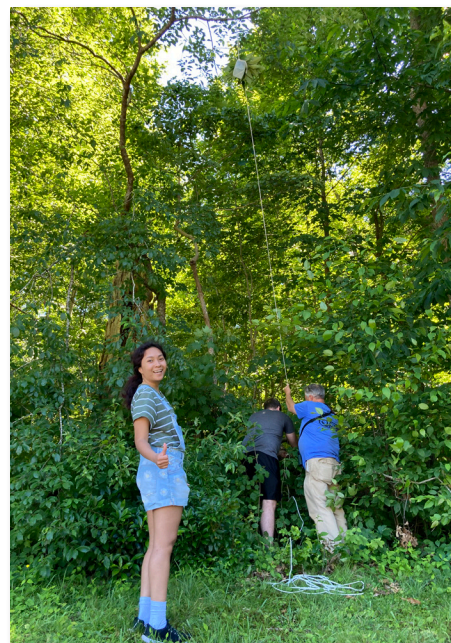
American Chestnut Reproduction,” was designed by chapter President Jack Swatt with additional support from Prof. Rachel Jeffrey of Southern Connecticut State University and chapter board member Prof. Lindsay Rush of Mitchell College. Designed to explore alternatives to hand pollination, their findings could be valuable for collecting nuts from difficult to access trees.

When desirable mature chestnut trees are identified by our chapter or members of the public, fertile nuts from the tree are often sought. However, open pollination requires another fertile tree nearby. Some desirable trees lacked fertile nuts in previous years, suggesting the lack of a pollination partner nearby. Traditionally, collecting seeds from these trees required hand pollination, a labor-intensive process often involving ladders or bucket trucks. Depending on their accessibility, some trees may never be good candidates for hand pollination.

Joshua and Alina’s project involved cutting pollen-producing branches from a donor tree, placing them in jugs with water, and lifting those jugs with rope in or near tree to be pollinated. The hope was that wind would carry pollen to the (now nearby) branches for fertilization. Josh and Alina visited several trees in Roxbury, Seymour, Salem, and Mystic that Jack had identified as not producing open-pollinated nuts in previous years. Jugs with donor pollen were set up in June, removed after a week or two, and burrs collected in September. While rates varied, fertile nuts were found! Not bagging flowers during this pollination method prevents full confidence of the pollen source but has value in generating nuts if none were otherwise available. Overall, this pilot project suggests the feasibility of using the jug pollination method for difficult to access trees in the future. Thanks to Josh and Alina for all their hard work! 🍂



Josh and Jack select pollen-bearing branches from a Seymour tree in June 2024. Photo by Lindsay Rush



Alina, Josh, and Jack raise a pollen branch filled jug by rope near a mature chestnut in Salem, CT in June 2024. Photo by Lindsay Rush

Protecting Chestnut Seedlings from Deer Browse using a Slash Wall

By Jack Swatt

Look for a full article on Slash Walls by Jack Swatt in the upcoming edition of Chestnut magazine



A large part of our restoration process will be planting chestnut trees in forest settings to see how well the trees will compete with other forest trees in order to succeed. This is usually done as part of a forest regeneration harvest. A big obstacle with planting chestnut trees in the wild is browsing by the overabundant deer population in the Northeast. One

novel approach developed by Dr. Peter Smallidge from Cornell University is to create an enclosure called a slash wall. In 2022 slash walls (*see above, photo by Jack Swatt*) were built at two study sites on different Regional Water Authority (RWA) properties. A slash wall is constructed during a timber harvest by piling up the tops and limbs of harvested

trees, as well as lesser valued trees and undergrowth, around the periphery of the study area. While deer are prevented from entering the area, other wildlife are unaffected. According to RWA Forester Casey Cordes, trail cameras have recorded bobcat, coyote and even bear within the slash walls. Cordes adds “The walls will settle and breakdown over time at a rate of about 10% per year. Eventually deer will be able to enter the harvested area, but by then, most of the regenerated oaks, maple and hickory will have grown tall enough that they will not be affected.”

This past October, Casey led a tour of one of these wall sites for TACF Staff and Restoration Committee members during the annual meetings held in Cromwell. The comparison of lush vegetation growth inside the slash wall compared to the extensive deer browse outside of it was remarkable. As we look for places to plant chestnuts in forest management areas, slash walls will be a significant consideration in preventing deer browse, rather than using traditional deer fencing. Although it was not part of any formal study, about 500 backcrossed American chestnut seedlings from TACF were planted within one of the two RWA slash walls where a lone flowering American chestnut tree was spared from the harvest. Time will tell if these seedlings will survive in this protected regenerating forest. 🍂



Casey Cordes talking during the slash wall tour on the Regional Water Authority properties for the TACF staff on October 21, 2025 - Photo by Jules Smih

Volunteer Opportunities *By Jack Swatt*



Table at the 2024 Durham State fair. You could help us engage with the public and show them our work!

This past year, TACF hosted the 2024 National American Chestnut Symposium in Cromwell CT.

In 1991, a group of Connecticut volunteers joined together to form the second state chapter of TACF. All the work that has been done over these past 40 years to organize our chapter, search for wild American chestnuts, plant our orchards, and educate the public about our cause was performed entirely by our Connecticut volunteers. I can't express enough our gratitude for all the volunteer efforts that our members have contributed to get us to where we are now. As we enter our 5th decade, we will continue to offer opportunities for all our members and volunteers to help further progress towards chestnut restoration.

We are continuing to find or learn about flowering wild American chestnuts and have assembled willing volunteers into our Germplasm Committee. Volunteers are needed throughout the state to help search for new sources of Germplasm

as well as monitoring known chestnut trees for flowering to determine the optimal time for pollination. In the fall, help is also needed to organize and perform harvesting of these as well as open-pollinated nuts. When springtime comes around we also rely on volunteers, from our chapter as well as host organizations, to help us plant the germinating chestnuts into our Germplasm Conservation Orchards and Seed Orchards. We organize many outreach events throughout the year that rely on volunteers to help, and even the newsletter that you are now reading was created by volunteers.

As our roles are expanding, TACF will be rolling out two new programs this spring that will help us enlist new volunteers and keep track of volunteer hours. On the TACF web site is a VOLUNTEER page under the ENGAGE tab. There, new volunteers can fill out an online application which will be directed to our chapter. The link will also continue to a volunteer waiver form which can be signed electronically. We will encourage existing volunteers to go to the page and fill out those forms. While the volunteer application will be optional, the volunteer waiver form will be required. The forms can be filled out online prior to a volunteer event, but we will have printed copies available for people to sign which can be scanned in a later time. The volunteer waiver form will only need to be filled out once and will be applied to any volunteer event. Also on this web page is a link to software that will record volunteer hours. People who perform other

TACF is on Instagram

Need more chestnuts info and content?

Follow TACF on instagram! You'll find photos, videos, and everything you need to know about our work and upcoming events and webinars!

@TheAmericanChestnutFoundation

volunteer work will be familiar with these processes as they are commonly used by other organizations, and we will be updating our chapter to current standard practices.

These programs were developed with the help of our Regional Outreach Coordinator, Catherine Martini. She explained the benefits of this program as follows. "We know recording hours is a cultural change for many of you, but we're aiming to make this as easy as possible before we transition to a software that will help all of us communicate and keep track of the valuable work you're doing. This volunteer recorder is simple to use – you can fill out your hours for the whole season at once, or enter your hours as you go so you don't forget or lose what you've done. The data from this will help chapters and national plan appropriately for future work days, make better decisions about where to allocate resources, and give us more accurate information when applying for grants. It's long past time we recognize all the long hours you dedicate to American chestnut restoration!" 🍂

CT-TACF Officers and Board of Directors

Officers

President – Jack Swatt
Vice President – Fred Behringer
Treasurer – Dr. Jack Ostroff
Secretary & Research Coordinator – Dr. Florian Carle

Board of Directors (term ending)

Renée Allen (2026)
Dr. Phill Arnold (2026)
Dr. David Bingham (2024)
Michael Gaffey (2025)
Jim Gage (2026)
David Liedlich (2026)
Dr. Bert Malkus (2026)
Jack Morris (2026)

Dr. Lindsay Rush (2025)
Mark Vollaro (2026)
E. Woods Sinclair (2025)

Contact

CTChapter@tacf.org



ACTIVITIES OF THE CONNECTICUT CHAPTER



PLANTING & MANAGING ORCHARDS IN THE STATE



CROSS POLLINATION



INOCULATION



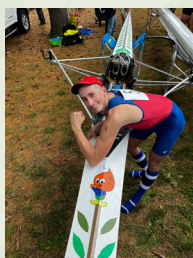
CHESTNUT RESEARCH



OUTREACH & EDUCATION



HIKES & TREE SEARCHES



CHESTNUT SHENANIGANS





Upcoming Calendar of Events

All of the events scheduled are subject to possible change. Please check our online calendar at tacf.org/ct for any updates.

CT Flower and Garden Show, Hartford

February 20-23, 2025

Stop by our table in the CT Federated Garden exhibit to see the work of the Foundation.

Presentation on The Restoration of the American Chestnut

March 29, 2025 - 11 AM - 12 PM

Join us at Woodbury public library for a talk on why the American chestnut was so important to the area and the steps to restore this iconic tree to the eastern forests. This event is organized in partnership with the The Woodbury Shade Tree & Sidewalk Committee

Annual Membership Meeting, Rockfall

April 5, 2025 - 9 AM - 2 PM

Join us for our Annual Membership Meeting in person, at the Connecticut

Forest & Park Association in Rockfall/Middletown. featuring a talk by Sara Fitzsimmons. The Spring Board Meeting will also follow the Annual Membership Meeting.

Orchard Plantings, throughout CT

May, 2024

We will need volunteers to help with planting American chestnut seeds in several new Germplasm Conservation Orchards throughout the state Details will be made available as it gets closer to planting season.

Chestnut Hikes

June/July, 2024

Late June and early July are great times to look for chestnut trees when their fragrant cream-colored blooms make the trees more visible. A schedule of hikes will be sent via chapter email and posted on our website as it gets closer to that time. If

you would be interested in leading a hike to known or potential chestnut locations, contact us at CTChapter@acf.org.

CAES Plant Science Day, Hamden

August 6, 2025

Join us at the lovely Lockwood Farm in Hamden for the 115th CAES Plant Science Day where we will welcome you with an exhibit on the Foundation work, surrounded by a wide variety of chestnut trees!

Exhibit at the Durham Fair

September 25-28, 2025

The Durham Fair is one of the largest fairs in CT. We host an exhibit educating people about the American chestnut and our mission in the Discovery Center. Stop by, shuck chestnuts harvested a few days before the fair, and come ask all your questions!