

# The West Virginia Chapter of The American Chestnut Foundation NEWSLETTER



*In the heart of American chestnut's natural range*

June 2023

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## Table of Contents

**WV Spring Chapter Meeting.....Page 1**  
**TACF's New President & CEO.....Page 2**  
**April Chapter Presidents' Mtg..... Page 3**  
**Dentatabase.....Page 4**  
**Potomac State Potting.....Page 5**  
**Shepherd University Planting.....Page 5**  
**Update on State Plantings.....Page 5**  
**Chapter Virtual Meeting.....Page 6**



## WV Chapter Spring Meeting

The spring chapter meeting was held Saturday, April 15 at the Waco Center on the campus of Glenville State University. The 2-hour meeting covered a variety of topics. After approving the minutes from the October 2022 meeting, the financial report was discussed. As of February 2023, the chapter has \$70,920.10 in our account. Our membership currently stands at 153 members. A request by Robert Sypolt for \$2,000 for the 2023 Rowlesburg Chestnut Festival was approved.

There was a review of some of the activities from 2022:

- Expanded GCO at Sutton Dam (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers)
- Expanded GCO at Queens (Upshur County)
- Replaced dead seedlings at University Forest GCO using American chestnut seedlings from Darrell Dean
- Planted GCO in Fayetteville
- Planted GCO at McClain property (Pocahontas County)
- Planted GCO at Chestnut Mountain Ranch
- Replanted GCO at Summit Bechtel Reserve
- WV Chapter's first grant to WVU's Science Adventure School
- First chapter pollination workshop at Waddell Orchard in Kingwood, led by Dr. Don Kines
- Presentations:
  - Master Naturalists at Chief Logan State Park
  - Lewis Cook talked to Oceana High School students
  - Tomato Fest
  - Central Hampshire County
  - DAR
  - WVU Conservation Biology Class
- Rowlesburg Chestnut Festival (crowning of Jeff Kochenderfer)
- Tour of Rick Sypolt's farm following fall meeting

Some of the 2023 activities proposed included:

- Obtained D40 pots/stands from Meadowview farm
- Seedlings are being grown at 5 greenhouses: Morgantown; Shepherd University; Potomac State; Fayetteville; and at Central Preston Middle School in Kingwood
- Replanted seedlings at Old Hemlock
- Added to Fayetteville and Parsons GCOs
- Will start a 60-tree planting at the Plant Materials Center in Alderson
- Direct seed 100 chestnuts in each of three WV State Forests: Greenbri-

er, Seneca and Calvin Price with the WV Division of Forestry

- Work day, Saturday, April 22 at the Summit Bechtel Reserve

The WV chapter documentary film being directed by **Robert Tinnell** was discussed. Robert Tinnell's students from the Douglas Education Center in Monessen, PA interviewed four individuals who had some recollection of chestnut from their childhood or memories of the aftermath of chestnut following the pandemic. The film will be West Virginia's contribution to TACF's 40th anniversary and will be debuted at the October 8, 2023 Rowlesburg Chestnut Festival.

TACF's Spring Virtual Meeting focused on operations at the national level and included the following:

1. Insurance and Licensing
2. Chapter Manual
3. Regional Outreach Coordinator
4. 40th Anniversary of TACF
5. Full-time web administrator
6. New Mid-Atlantic RSC

A team of four individuals from the national office are working to determine if chapter insurance for each chapter will be recommended or required. The decision should be made by the end of this year.

A chapter manual is in process, and the manual will help define the roles and responsibilities for chapter officers and board of directors. The WV chapter does not have roles defined for our officers or directors.

TACF hired two new Regional Outreach Coordinators. The WV chapter has been assigned to **Catherine Martini**, pictured below. She is housed in Albany, NY and she will assist with the writing of the chapter's manual as well as helping chapters in membership, recruiting, etc. We look forward to working with Catherine.

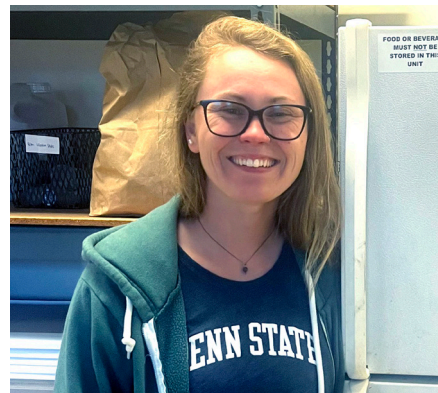


This year is the 40th anniversary of TACF. Each chapter is encouraged to celebrate in their own way. As stated earlier, our chapter will celebrate with the documentary film that archives the memories of four individuals. If any member has other ideas, feel free to share them with any member of the board or at: [wvchapter@gmail.com](mailto:wvchapter@gmail.com).

TACF hired a new full-time web administrator, **Hal Brindley**, to assist with the following:

- Website rankings so TACF is more visible on the internet—will focus on keywords
- Communicate TACF's vision, expertise
- ADA compliance (making website available to those who use screen readers)
- All financial reports and magazines will be viewed as a magazine

A new Mid-Atlantic Regional Science Coordinator was hired. **Cassie Stark** will work with the KY, MD, VA and WV chapters, and she began May 8. Cassie was the laboratory manager at Meadowview, so she is well versed in chestnut and the pathogen. We welcome Cassie and we look forward to working with her.



## Dr. William Pitt Named TACF's New President & CEO

Conservation leader **Dr. William Pitt** has been appointed President & CEO of The American Chestnut Foundation (TACF). Dr. Pitt (who goes by Will) will further the organization's mission currently led by President & CEO Lisa Thomson who announced in 2022 her wish to step down after more than 8 years of service. Dr. Pitt will assume his responsibilities on July 31, 2023.

With over 25 years of experience leading science and conservation efforts in the U.S. and around the world,

Dr. Pitt is passionate about the environment and creating opportunities where all people benefit from conservation action. As President & CEO, he will lead TACF in its pioneering work to preserve North America's forest legacy, despite continued and increasing threats from introduced pests and pathogens.

In making this announcement **William J. Cude**, Chair of TACF's Board of Directors stated, "I am thrilled to have Dr. Pitt joining our team. We are at a critical juncture in our history as we begin to focus on the restoration of this iconic species. He is superbly qualified to lead this effort."

Currently, Dr. Pitt is deputy director at the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute leading six science centers and education and conservation programs, as well as administration and operations. Previously, with the USDA's National Wildlife Research Center and as a researcher, he focused on restoration of ecosystems, reducing the impact of invasive species, and training the next generation throughout his career.

Dr. Pitt also expressed his enthusiasm in accepting his new role stating, "I am honored to be joining this inspiring team that is developing disease-resistant populations and building widespread community support to restore the iconic American chestnut. Due to the ground-breaking efforts over the last 40 years, TACF is launching a new phase of restoration in the American landscape." Dr. Pitt has published more than 90 peer-reviewed articles and books. He earned both a Ph.D. in Ecology and a M.S. in Wildlife Ecology from Utah State University and a B.S. in Fish and Wildlife Biology from the University of Minnesota.

TACF engaged Kittleman & Associates to conduct a search for its new President & CEO. Kittleman & Associates is a national executive search firm that specializes in the recruitment of CEOs for tax-exempt nonprofit organizations, public charities, and philanthropic organizations.

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***"I am honored to be joining this inspiring team that is developing disease-resistant populations and building widespread community support to restore the iconic American chestnut." Will Pitt***

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## April Chapter Presidents' Meeting

Presidents of the 16 state chapters of TACF meet monthly via a Zoom call and the April meeting featured a report from the Massachusetts/Rhode Island chapter. **Kathy Desjardin** is their chapter president; she is in her second year. She reported that MA/RI currently has 270 members, down from a high of 480. She stated that many of the volunteers who work on their chapter chestnut orchards are not members. They has five meetings each year: January; April; July; and October. Their annual meeting, held in Decmeber, features a keynote speaker and a buffet dinner.

The MA/RI chapter has employed a number of interns over the years. Their four interns in 2022 were paid hourly over the summer months. Money for the interns is raised locally and sent to the Asheville office. Checks for the interns are then paid from the national office. The interns are mostly responsible for mowing and weeding orchards. In addition, they also have done pollinations and inoculations to assess resistance in some lines. The interns are supervised by orchard volunteers who approve their time and provide duties each week. The orchards are fenced, and they are installing irrigation.

The chapter has seven seeds orchards in the two states with approximatley 25,000 trees total. Thus, they need interns to help with maintenance. For the last few years, the chapter has phased to crossing Best X Best trees.

In 2019, the then president and one board member resigned over TACF's embracing the State University of New York's genetically modified tree, 'Darling 58'. Those two individuals strongly opposed using any genetically modified material. The chapter has struggled with how to approach 'Darling 58' since the two board members resigned. In January 2023, the board put together an Ad Hoc committee to study 'Darling 58'. They just recently voted to accept 'Darling 58'. Thirteen were in favor, 7 were against and 1 board member abstained. If 'Darling 58' is deregulated by USDA and EPA, the MA/RI chapter will use 'Darling 58' pollen in their orchards.

The MA/RI chapter has number of middle and high schools involved with their work as well as students from the University of Rhode Island. Some of the high school students pot up trees and some schools have climate controlled greenhouses that the chapter uses. There is a breeding orchard on the grounds of one middle school. Also, there is a nature-based Pre-K to 8th grade school

that collaborates with the MA/RI chapter.

After the MA/RI presentation, the two new Regional Outreach Coordinators (**Catherine Martini and Hannah Leeper**) spoke about some national updates. Each chapter president was asked to send in their bylaws and a list of their chapter leadership members. The goal of TACF is to have a standard liability waiver form for volunteers working in chapter orchards.

Since 2023 is the 40th anniversary of TACF (the Foundation was incorporated on June 22, 1983 in Minneapolis, MN), each chapter is encouraged to celebrate in their own state rather than at a national meeting. On Earth Day (April 22), TACF premiered its documentary film (**CLEAR DAY THUNDER: Rescuing the American Chestnut**) at the arboretum in Asheville, NC. The film, featuring **Dolly Parton** and **President Jimmy Carter**, is 53 minutes and it focuses more on the chestnut story as opposed to science. Chapters are encouraged to show the film. If the WV chapter would like to have a showing or several showings, we simply have to fill out a user form, and we will be given access to the film. If any WV chapter members would like to gather some people together to watch the film, contact Mark Double at: **wvchapter@gmail.com**. There is no cost or rules associated with showing the film. You can view the 3 minute, 40 second trailer of the film by using your browser--type in 'Clear Day Thunder, Rescuing the American Chestnut'.



TACF is developing a new logo. The final product was supposed to be finished in time to be incorporated into TACF's documentary film. The concept for the new logo is being designed by the firm, Blue Ion. Their concept featured a nut, but feedback was not encouraging. Blue Ion was asked to develop some new concepts that utilize the chestnut leaf. The final new logo should be complet-

ed this year.

The 2023 national meeting will be held at the American Eagle Foudation in Kodak, TN, October 26-29. Information on this meeting will be forthcoming over the summer.

## Dentatabase

**Sara Fitzsimmons**, Chief Conseration Officer for TACF, gave an overview of the database used by TACF to track chestnut trees in the U.S. These include wild American chestnut trees, backcross trees, germplasm conservation orchards, progeny tests, demonstration orchards and seed orchards. Sara was hired as a TACF intern in 1999 to digitize paper records into Excel. Since Meadowview research farms was using Hypercard on a Mac-based system, the files were transferred to Hypercard. Sara was then hired full-time in 2003 at Penn State University, and she was able to secure \$200,000 funding for 'echestnut' with the help of then TACF president, Marshal Case. An additional \$30,000 was used to develop 'tacftrees.org'. All of these avenues were not sufficient, so a freelance developer was hired in 2011-12 to develop a database for chestnut trees. After 18 months of weekly meetings, they found that the cost of a developer ranged from \$50,000 to \$500,000. A middle-of-the-road developer was chosen for \$90,000, and development started. The current database, 'Dentatabase' is hosted by Heroku. After years of planning, Dentatabase sacrificed usability for reliability. While the database is quite useful, it is not very user-friendly.

A very user-friendly database is 'TreeSnap' The downside of TreeSnap is that it is not very functional. Many trees that are 'snapped' in TreeSnap as American chestnut are often are other species (i.e. horse chesnut, beech, chestnut oak). For this reason, TreeSnap has not been linked to Dentatabase.

Sara stated that \$200,000 is available to make additional improvements to Dentatabase.

**Mark Double** has spent several months learning the progam, and he is in the process of entering all the chapter germplasm conservation orchards and many of the backcross plantings. To enter trees into Dentatabase, GPS coordinates are needed, and many of our backcross plantings do not have associated GPS data.

WV chapter vice-president, **Jerry Legg**, is trying to learn Dentabase, so our chapter will have a second member who has the knowledge to enter orchards.

### Potomac State Potting

**Bernie and Linda Coyle** of Keyser enlisted the help of **Dr. Donna Ballard** from Potomac State College. Dr. Ballard donated space in their greenhouse and she has been faithfully watering the seedlings all spring. Potomac State has grown hybrid and European chestnuts along with some Allegheny Chinquapins.

Dr. Ballard received her Ph.D. from West Virginia University in Agriculture with an emphasis in Horticulture. She teaches Plant Science, Agronomy, Horticulture and History of Landscape Architecture and she serves as the faculty advisor for the Ag. & Forestry Clubs, Collegiate 4-H, Agronomy and Horticulture. Our thanks to Bernie, Linda and Donna for their work at Potomac State.

### Shepherd University Planting

**Susan Thompson** of Shepherd University spearheaded a planting on their campus in early May. The planting included 19 volunteers and two reporters, one from West Virginia Public radio and one from an unnamed Washington DC TV station. WV TACF was mentioned frequently during the interviews. Below is a picture of Susan with a map of the backcross chestnut planting. Thanks to Susan's record-keeping, the data for this planting was successfully entered into Dentabase.



Susan Thompson at the Tabler Farm planting in Shepherdstown

### Update on State Plantings

In 2022, ten American chestnut seedlings were planted at West Virginia's State 4-H camp, **Jackson's Mill**. The Mill was named after the Confederate General, Stonewall Jackson. About 5 acres of the Jackson homestead was deeded to the State of West Virginia for the purpose of creating a state 4-H camp, and the first camp was held in 1921.

The planting site at Jackson's Mill was not the best--it was along the West Fork River. As of May 2023, there were four survivors. An additional 10 trees were donated to the Mill by the WV-TACF chapter. Below is a photo of the wire cages surrounding three of the four surviving trees.



WV-TACF chapter board member, **Linda Coyle** and her husband, **Bernie**, have been distributing chestnut seedlings in the eastern panhandle. Linda is a member of the Daughter's of the American Revolution and her DAR chapter received an award for planting three chestnut trees at the Carskadon Mansion, a historic home overlooking Mineral Street in Keyser. Linda, (left below) is pictured with **June Cooper** of Mineral County holding chestnut seedlings.



**Chestnut Mountain Ranch (CMR)**, located just outside Morgantown, WV is a home for middle school-aged wayward boys. In 2022, 24 American chestnut trees were planted, but only one survived. Too little water and too poor soil may have contributed to the loss. Eleven additional trees were planted in 2023 with the hope these will fare better. Below is a photo of a seedling in front of the chapel at CMR.



## Chapter's Meeting-Virtual Retreat: Communications and Membership

On June 2, a 2-hour virtual retreat was held with the focus on communications and membership.

**Barbara Wood** is TACF's membership director and she talked about the process of keeping track of all current members in each of the 16 state chapters. The 'renewal process' for all members includes emails for members who have chosen 'paperless' options, and letters for members without an email address. Three communications are sent to every member: two months before their expiration month; one month before; and during the month of expiration.

There was discussion about members vs donors. Some individuals may donate money to TACF, either through the national office or through state chapters, but they may not necessarily be members. The membership team is working

to create harmony with gift-giving, as some gifts may be made to the chapters without the knowledge of the national organization. Everyone wants to make sure that all gifts are recorded accurately.

General membership in TACF is \$40 per year. With that comes a subscription to the **Chestnut** magazine that is published three times per year. Also included is a chapter affiliation, and each chapter receives \$15 from every \$40 membership.

Above and beyond regular membership are 'Seed Levels'. For a \$300 gift, members receive 4 backcross seeds per year. Six seeds are provided to \$500 donors and 12 seeds to \$1000 donors. For years, the WV chapter has been giving backcross seedlings to any paid WV member. This seems to be going against the policy of the national organization who provide advanced backcross seeds as an extra benefit. The membership team will discuss our policy, and changes may be made in the future.

As stated on Page 4 in this newsletter, **Blue Ion** has been developing new branding and a new logo. Rebranding is important as TACF is at a key moment in time:

- to reach and engage a new and broader audience;
- to activate the next generation and those not currently familiar with TACF; and
- to take full advantage of a new wave of excitement.

New branding will be: (1) more compelling; (2) more coherent; and (3) more consistent.

The Blue Ion group has completed their research, planning and writing. The design aspect is still in process. They hope to have something to show to members of the national organization and state chapter representatives shortly.

Finally, one of the most asked questions to TACF staff members is: How do I receive American chestnut seedlings? The bareroot seedling sale is held in March, but they generally sell out in 2-hours on a first-come-first serves basis.