



The West Virginia Chapter of The American Chestnut Foundation **NEWSLETTER**



In the heart of American chestnut's natural range

May 2025

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Award-Winning Social Studies Fair Winner

Bella, a student at Oakvale Elementary School in Princeton, WV, presented her social studies fair project on American chestnut. Bella used information from TACF's website, and she took first place in her school's competition. Bella competed in the Regional Social Studies Fair on March 28, and she won! Bella presented her chestnut project in Charleston at the State Social Studies Fair at the Charleston Coliseum and Convention Center on April 11, 2025 and she took third place. Congratulations, Bella. The principal at Oakvale Elementary is **LaCosta Hodges**, and she put Bella in touch with the WV chapter who then directed Bella to TACF's website. It is heart-warming to see our youth taking up the cause for American chestnut and informing the public of the cause for this iconic tree.



Bella stands in front of her award-winning project on American chestnut.

Robert Sypolt with the Rowlesburg Chestnut Festival was so impressed with Bella's project, that he offered to pay the expenses for Bella and her family to attend the October 12, 2025 chestnut festival. While the chestnut festival is always held on Sunday, it remains to be seen if Bella's family will take Robert up on his offer, given that there is school the following day. Nonetheless, Bella's project has made us all proud of her efforts with chestnut.



Bella and her elementary school principal, LaCosta Hodges.

TACF Spring Board Meeting

The American Chestnut Foundation held its annual spring board meeting in Abingdon, VA. The WV chapter was represented by President **Bernie Coyle** and board member, **Linda Coyle**.

As part of the meeting, there was a tour of TACF's Meadowview Research Farm, less than 10 miles from Abingdon. **Dr. Vasiliy Lakoba**, TACF's Director of Research at Meadowview, led a tour of the farm. American chestnuts and various generations of hybrid trees could be seen from the oldest surviving trees or their sprouts that were planted nearly 40 years ago, to more recent plantings of advanced hybrids. Extensive enclosures of large areas with deer-proof fencing has precluded the need for caging and tall tree tubes in recent plantings. Shorter tubes are still needed to protect seedlings from small mammals such as squirrels and voles.

This year's greenhouse seedlings are growing well. They have fully transitioned from the D40 pots and stands, many of which we inherited for growing WV chapter seedlings, to 4-inch by 14-inch square pots, with nine of these in a one-foot square container. The

new pots require a lot more potting soil, but they better accommodate rapid growth from intensive water and fertilization management. With additional volume for growing roots, pots also can be held over to a second growing season if they cannot all be planted in the field, or if there is a desire for larger, two-year-old seedlings. The held-over pots are stored for the winter in small, covered greenhouses.

Another highlight of the tour was the new greenhouse facility. It is not yet on-line, but is nearing completion. Unlike most conventional greenhouses, this unit provides year-round climate control, including cooling in the summer, so that trees can be retained in the greenhouse for longer periods for particular research studies. Part of the new facility includes solar panels to provide the electricity.



TACF's Mid-Atlantic Regional Science Coordinator, Cassie Stark and WV chapter board president, Bernie Coyle, touring one of the Meadowview orchards.



The new Meadowview greenhouse complete with solar panels.



TACF's interim board president, Bruce Levine (left), and TACF's Director of Research at Meadowview Research Farms, Vasiliy Lakoba inspect American chestnut seedlings at the Meadowview greenhouse.



TACF's Director of Research, Dr. Jared Westbrook (left) in a Legacy Tree orchard. Trees in these orchards have been supported by \$10,000 donations, and they have good resistance. The WV chapter has 4 Legacy Trees.



WV Chapter board member, Linda Coyle, inspects chestnut seedlings that have been overwintered in small, covered greenhouses at the Meadowview Research Farm. The larger pots aid in overwintering seedlings so that 2-year-old seedlings can be utilized in some orchards.

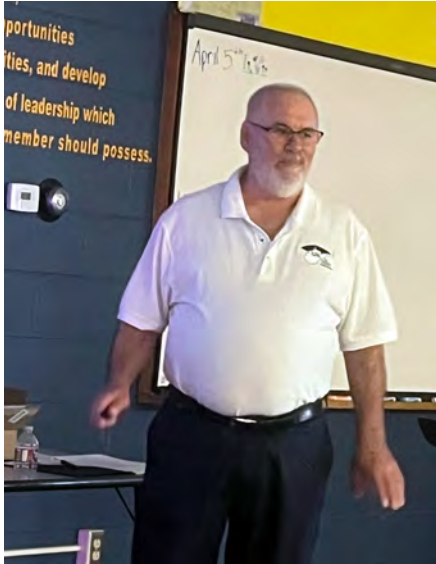


An overview of part of TACF's Meadowview Research Farm.

The Meadowview property and its facilities are used to preserve, study, and breed American chestnut trees for resistance to the chestnut blight fungus. Meadowview includes tens of thousands of trees at various stages of the breeding process, planted on more than 150 acres.

WV Spring Chapter Meeting

On March 5, 2025, chapter president, **Bernie Coyle**, hosted the WV chapter meeting at the Mineral County Vo-Tech Center in Keyser, WV.



WV Chapter President, Bernie Coyle leading the meeting.

Mark Double provided an update on some of the chestnut plantings in WV. We have more than 70 backcross orchards ranging from one tree (WV State Capitol in Charleston) to 1,000 trees in several locations. The 900-tree orchard at the Agronomy Farm in Morgantown has trees that are now 10" in diameter and 40' tall. The WV chapter has 27 germplasm conservation orchards. Survival data for some of those orchards was provided as seen below.

2025 Survival	Alive/Total Trees
Lewis Cook (Fayette Co.)	24/80
Glenn and Jeanie Riggelman (Pendleton Co.)	38/48
Summit Bechtel Reserve (Fayette Co.)	14/40 (Fire Ring) 9/34 (Wood Lot)
Susan Thompson (Jefferson Co.)	33/33 (14 are >3' tall)
Donny Dodd (Raleigh Co.)	20/50
Jackson's Mill (Lewis Co.)	4/10
University Forest (Preston Co.)	4/30

TACF is currently genotyping seedlings that were planted in their Meadowview, VA greenhouse. These seedlings are from 'Best X Best' crosses. After the genotyping is complete, the very best seedlings will be designated for planting. These 100-tree orchards will be planted across

the range of American chestnut. The WV chapter hopes to have two of these 'Best X Best' plantings in Parsons (Tucker County) and Burnsville (Braxton County). The planting date will depend on when the genotyping results are finalized. The plantings could be established in the fall of 2025 or spring of 2026.

The vast majority of the seedlings raised by the WV chapter annually come from the former Clements tree nursery in Mason County. **WV Governor, Patrick Morrisey**, announced in February that Fidelis and Babcock and Wilcox have joined forces in their development of B&W's BrightLoop facility at the Mountaineer GigaSystem site in Mason County--the same site where the 200-tree chestnut orchard is located. This site will be a AI data campus utilizing West Virginia's abundant coal, natural gas and biomass energy resources. The proposed plant will encompass 2,300 acres. At this time, it is unknown if the chestnut orchard will remain unscathed.

In 2024, former WV Secretary of Commerce, **James Bailey** assured the WV chapter that the chestnut trees would not be removed. However, with the change of administration, James Bailey is no longer in office. The current WV Secretary of Commerce is **Dr. Matt Herridge**. Despite attempts to contact Secretary Herridge's office, he has not responded to our calls about the future of the chestnut orchard. We hope to have more information about the fate of the chestnut trees in the near future.

With the turnover in administration at TACF's national office, a current financial report was not obtained. The WV chapter over the past few years has a balance of funds in the \$70,000 to \$72,000 range. It is believed that the current balance remains in that range.

The WV chapter has had an increase in membership over the last year. We now have 160 members.

In terms of the WV Board of Directors, two directors, **Dr. Lewis Cook** and **Dr. Melissa Thomas-VanGundy's** term expire in 2025. **Dr. Darrell Dean** notified the chapter that he is stepping down as a member of the WV board immediately.

A final piece of business was the request by the Rowlesburg Chestnut Festival for \$2,000 from the WV-TACF chapter. A unanimous vote approved the expenditure.

Following the chapter meeting, a 2-hour session was open to the public. A number of interested individuals attended the meeting. They heard a brief presentation of the history of American chestnut from Mark Double. He was followed by **Cassie Stark**, TACF's Regional Science Coordinator from Charlottesville, VA. Cassie brought everyone up-to-date on the current science of backcross breeding. She also stated that individuals can help the chapter by locating flowering American chestnut trees. If the chestnut orchard in Mason County is removed, we will need many individuals to locate and collect chestnuts this fall.

Greenhouse Seedlings

Chestnuts were potted at the West Virginia University greenhouse on February 22. The nuts were sowed into 9" deepots and inspected daily to see if watering was warranted. After four weeks, nuts that produced a shoot were tallied. The results are as follows.



Cassie Stark brings members up-to-date on current chestnut research

Following the meeting, three chestnut seedlings were raffled off. The three lucky winners are seen below.



Tree	#Nuts Planted	% With Shoots
American Chestnuts		
Clements Nursery, Mason County		
9-E	21	76%
020	96	84%
9-2008	100	72%
001	85	93%
006	86	83%
5-9	99	51%
2-E	21	33%
4-M	30	53%
5-E	52	62%
9-M	126	94%
1-E	34	88%
008	86	83%
Fernow Experimental Forest, Tucker County		
Fernow	12	25%
Tyler County		
Friendly	70	67%
Garrett County, MD		
Jacob's Road	36	100%
Chinese Chestnut		
Agronomy Farm, Morgantown	43	70%



Chestnut seedlings after 4 weeks in the WVU greenhouse
Some trees have a very high percentage of shoot production while others are poor. It would be easy

not to label individual trees and simply collect nuts en masse. However, since trees vary widely in their ability to produce shoots, the trees that develop from these seedlings also may vary greatly. For that reason, those WV chapter members who have requested seedlings get seedlings from a variety of trees. That way, in the event that some trees produce poor offspring, getting a variety of seedlings helps to offset that possibility.

Potomac State Greenhouse

About 170 chestnut seedlings were given to **Bernie and Linda Coyle** for WV chapter members living in the eastern panhandle. These seedlings were transferred to the Potomac State greenhouse in Keyser. Eastern panhandle chapter members can pick up their seedlings in Keyser rather than having to drive to Morgantown.



Linda Coyle with chestnut seedlings in the Potomac State greenhouse.

West Virginia Extension Master Gardener Association's Annual Conference

Garden enthusiasts from near and far were invited to the 30th annual West Virginia Master Gardener Conference that was held on April 11-13, 2025 at Canaan Valley Resort & Conference Center in Davis, West Virginia.

The WV chapter of TACF was well represented by **Bernie and Linda Coyle** and **Carla Kesling**. They educated the participants about TACF and the WV chapter. Carla was a member of the planning committee, so she was very involved with the entire meeting.



Linda Coyle, Carla Kesling and Bernie Coyle at a chestnut display at the WV Master Gardener's annual conference.

Elkins Tree Board

On March 26, 2025, **Mark Double** spoke to members and friends of the Elkins Tree Board. About 30 people were in attendance, and they heard a 45-minute presentation on the history of American chestnut and TACF's efforts toward restoration.

Prior to the meeting, Mark was interviewed by WBOY, Channel 12, Clarksburg. Having exposure to the chestnut cause is always beneficial.



Mark Double with the WBOY television reporter.

Central Preston Middle School

Robert Sypolt gave presentations to **Constance Eli's** 6th grade science classes at Central Preston Middle School. Robert spoke to all three of Ms. Eli's classes about American chestnut, and that included some potting of nuts.



Students in one of the three Central Preston Middle School sixth grade science classes that learned the chestnut story from Robert Sypolt.

Meeting in Charleston

The WV chapter has not held in meeting in Charleston in quite some time--decades actually. A plea went out to WV chapter members asking if someone would be willing to organize and host a meeting in Kanawha County. WV chapter member, **David Rutherford**, rose to the occasion and organized a meeting for April 22, 2025 at the Old Columbia Gas Building (Now TCEnergy) on MacCorkle Avenue in Charleston.

Mark Double spoke to about 40 TCEnergy employees during the lunch hour, and one employee expressed interest in joining the WV chapter. American chestnut seedlings were raffled off to two lucky winners.

Summit Bechtel Reserve Work Day

On 19 April 2025, **Sam Muncy** led a group of scouts from Oak Hill Troop 1885 on a work day at the Summit Bechtel Reserve in Fayette County. The WV chapter provided 50 American chestnut seedlings for the scouts to replant where seedlings had died. The group not only planted seedlings, but weeded around the living trees.



A few members of Oak Hill Troop 1885 planting American chestnut seedlings at the SBR.



Sam Muncy attaching flagging to tree cages at the SBR.

Oak Hill Troop 1885 has adopted the chestnut orchards at the Summit Bechtel Reserve. It takes a lot of coordination on the part of Sam Muncy and **Sharon Reeves Cottrill** to set a work date, provide all the materials necessary for planting and weed control, and provide education about American chestnut to the scouts and their leaders. Many thanks to Sam and Sharon for their needless energy and enthusiasm.



Some of the SBR planting group, adults and scouts.

Chestnut Data Collection

Dr. Melissa Thomas-VanGundy is a research forester for the U.S. Forest Service out of the Parsons office. One of Melissa's research projects includes American chestnut. She has two chestnut plantings, one near Cowen and one near St George. At both sites, an area was clearcut, fenced, and planted with a variety of hybrid, American and Asian chestnuts [26 families; 35 trees per row; 25 rows]. Seedlings were supplied by TACF, and the foundation had input into the development of the research goals, namely tracking the growth and health of these trees to determine if the third-generation hybrid has the form of the American chestnut and the blight resistance of the Asian chestnut. There were 875 trees planted at each site in 2011. On 25 April, **Carla Kesling, Amy Metheny and Jerry Legg** assisted Melissa with data collection at the St. George site. They took another round of diameter measurements for this site, and determined mortality. Unfortunately, they were only able to work for a half-day due to rain.



Melissa taking diameter on a study tree in St. George.



Amy Metheny, Melissa Thomas-VanGundy, Jerry Legg and Carla Kesling at the St. George site (Tucker County).



A photo of the St. George plot in 2018.