

# The Bur

Newsletter of the Virginia Chapter of  
The American Chestnut Foundation

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## *ATTENTION ALL VOLUNTEERS - Chestnut Planting Days Are Here Again!*

This spring the Virginia Chapter will be planting two new breeding orchards. Planting days are the most important activity of the year. Members are invited to participate, and we welcome friends and family too.

**What's involved in planting a breeding orchard?** Planting an orchard involves a series of steps. We start by preparing planting rows, laying out landscape fabric, marking planting sites and tacking in tree tubes. Next, we carefully plant chestnut seeds. Finally, we mulch and install tree tags at each site. By the end of the day, we will have planted 400 or more trees in a 1.5 acre field.

There are several tasks to be performed, so people who have difficulty stooping can help too. We will begin at 9:30 in the morning and work until we're done. The more volunteers, the sooner we finish. Volunteers are welcome to come for an hour, all day, or anywhere in between.

**What to bring?** Most tools will be supplied. Volunteers should bring a trowel or bulb planter and dress for the weather. VA TACF will supply lunch and water for volunteers.

**Where are the orchards?** Saturday, March 24, we will plant an orchard on Slate Mills Road near Boston, Virginia. Saturday, April 7, we will plant an orchard at Fried Farm near Crozet, VA. We will plant if it's drizzly, but not if it's raining. Rain date is the next day in both cases.

## Southwest Virginia Restoration Branch

The Southwest Virginia Restoration Branch will plant restoration American chestnuts this spring, assist at Meadowview Farms this summer, and hold our 3rd Annual Restoration Celebration this fall.

Our busy year started with a public talk on the theme *Bringing Back the Mighty American Chestnut to Our Area*. Dr. Laura Georgi, TACF geneticist, presented a history of the chestnut blight and the TACF breeding program: Bill Miller, VA Department of Forestry, described mine reclamation sites to receive restoration chestnuts: and Monica Appyby, Branch President, outlined activities of the Branch and volunteer needs.

Restoration Branch members will plant 500 blight-resistant American chestnuts on a 7-acre reclaimed mine area in Wise County Saturday, March 10. This is one of the Appalachian Regional Restoration Initiative sites that was prepared for planting last year.

The 3rd Annual Chestnut Restoration Celebration will be held October 13 at Heartwood, the new SW Virginia Artisan Gateway center location in Abingdon. The program will include storytellers with connections to chestnut. Doug Elliot, naturalist, herbalist, and storyteller from NC will be featured. In addition, we will tour Meadowview Farms with Doug leading a nature walk. The

Branch also designed and distributed a tri-fold brochure to publicize our accomplishments and to recruit more volunteers for our 2012 activities.

## *Welcome to the VA Chapter's newest member*

We are excited to introduce Sheri Shambor, Virginia Chapter's first Volunteer and Event Coordinator. Sheri's primary focus is you! She will help to make sure that you hear about volunteer activities, that you get the training and tools you need to make your volunteer experience fun and successful, and that we thank you properly for your contributions.

Sheri is an outdoor enthusiast and an avid hiker, she enjoys learning about trees and wildflowers, and wherever she is, her two chocolate labs are not far behind. Sheri moved to Virginia in 2008 and has enjoyed exploring the Shenandoah Mountains and riding. Catch Sheri in the office on Mondays and Thursdays.

## *President's Message - John Scrivani*

In 2011 the Virginia Chapter made real progress in breeding, testing, research and fund-raising. The year 2012 is promising to be just as exciting and productive.

In our efforts to develop locally adapted breeding lines we incorporated a second source of resistance (Nanking) using mother trees from both the Northern Virginia and Central Virginia areas. We are preparing to start two new orchards this spring in Culpeper and Albemarle Counties. Thanks to landowners Penny Firth, Marie Murphy and Barbara Fried for providing land and support for these orchards.

We are making plans for more pollination this spring in Northern and Central Virginia. We also hope to locate and pollinate suitable mother trees in some new areas, such as along the Blue Ridge Parkway between Roanoke and Waynesboro, and in the Allegheny Mountains of western Virginia.

In 2011 we established some partnerships with a few key collaborators to help with breeding and research. We signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Blue Ridge Parkway to locate and utilize mother trees in breeding. We also signed two MOUs with Shenandoah National Park, one for access to mother trees and another to start a cooperative re-

search study on the effects of prescribed fire on American chestnut sprout populations. We also established a collaborative relationship with the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute and the Bull Run Mountains Conservancy to start a research project on the Preserve.

These partnerships enable us to start research into some of the questions key to the long-term restoration of the species. At Bull Run Mountains scientists and volunteers will be planting chestnuts in forest openings to determine relative success in different-sized openings and conditions. In Shenandoah National Park we are monitoring chestnut sprout populations before and after prescribed burns. Preliminary observations suggest that chestnut sprouts vigorously after fire and fire may influence the prevalence of blight.

In 2011 the Chapter took the lead in a restoration test planting at Big Island, Virginia. Many volunteers helped make the planting a big success and the 400 plus restoration chestnuts planted there will provide use with valuable information on the performance of our restoration chestnuts in forest plantings.

The Sylvan Affair hosted last April by Sandy Lerner was enjoyed by all attending and netted almost \$50,000 to support TACF. The Southwest Restoration Branch hosted its second annual event also in April 2011. The branch is going strong and has plans for several events this Spring.

### Shenandoah National Park - Fire Effects in Sprout Populations of *Castanea dentata* and its Pathogen *Cryphonectria parasitica*

American chestnut was likely established and maintained in our forests, at least in part, by periodic forest fires. After the blight epidemic, the chestnut population was reduced to a much smaller population of mainly understory sprouts. These sprouts are top-killed in forest fires but re-sprout vigorously in most cases. Many observers have noticed this re-sprouting and what seems to be increases in growth and flowering after fire. While chestnuts respond to being clear-cut, other silvicultural activities and forest disturbances have been the subject of scientific studies, few studies have looked in detail at chestnut and the blight's responses to fire. To help address this void in our knowledge of the chestnut, the Virginia Chapter has started a cooperative research project with Shenandoah National Park. We will monitor chestnut sprout populations before and after planned prescribed fires in the park. We will measure top-kill, re-sprouting, flowering and blight incidence before and after fire to learn more about how fire and chestnuts interact in our forests.

## *The Learning Box Project by Kathy Marmet*

### **Virginia Chapter Plays Key Role in Learning Box Distribution**

In order to encourage teaching and learning about the American chestnut, the Education Committee of TACF's Development Cabinet has been developing an American Chestnut Learning Box. This box includes a variety of resources, including samples of leaves, nuts, burs and wood to enable hands-on learning. The target audience is educators in informal learning environments, such as nature centers and museums. In 2010 a Learning Box was distributed to each TACF Chapter. A limited number are now available for purchase, and Virginia Chapter volunteers have helped assemble them. A total of thirty-five American Chestnut Learning Boxes have been distributed to the Chapters, TACF staff and purchasers. Additional information about the American Chestnut Learning Box, and links to educational resources can be found at [http://www.acf.org/educational\\_programs.php](http://www.acf.org/educational_programs.php).



## *Bull Run Mountains American Chestnut Survival Study*

The Bull Run Mountains American Chestnut Survival Study is a three year project designed to increase the knowledge required to restore the American Chestnut in Virginia efficiently and effectively. The project is being undertaken by three organizations: Bull Run Mountains Conservancy (BRMC), Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute (SCBI), and Virginia Chapter of The American Chestnut Foundation (VATACF).

We are testing the influence of light and deer herbivory on American chestnut (*Castanea dentata*) seedling growth and survival in areas where the chestnut was once a dominant tree. We will vary light levels by planting seeds in both canopy gap and closed forest sites. Within each site, we will assign the seedlings to either control status or individually fence seedlings to protect them from deer.

The project will last approximately 2-1/2 years. Phase I of the project began in October 2011 plotting the locations where seedlings will be planted. In the spring of 2012 the chestnut

seedlings will be planted and then monitored for two growing seasons through the fall of 2013. The final six months of the project timeline will be used for data analysis and report preparation.

Various planting sites were located based on canopy, slope, and accessibility. Each site will be planted with a large number of donated American chestnuts using different silviculture techniques. Each site will be visited biweekly by volunteers to assess growth, survival and damage for two growing seasons. Three reconnaissance cameras will be placed among the sites to capture nocturnal activity.

A database will be developed to capture the number of seedlings to germinate, their growth rate, and evidence of browse, structural, or insect damage. Sites will then be compared to determine the cost and effectiveness of the various planting treatments. At the end of the project, SCBI will issue a report with its observations and conclusions. Stay tuned for more information!

## *Calendar of Events*

If you want to volunteer or attend an event, please call us at 540-364-1922 or email [VAChestnut@verizon.net](mailto:VAChestnut@verizon.net)

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**Saturday March 24, 2012 Orchard Planting!**

Where: Slate Mills Road near Boston, VA.

Time: 9:30 a.m. Rain date is Sunday, March 25th.

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**Saturday April 7, 2012 Orchard Planting!**

Where: Fried Farm near Crozet, VA.

Time: 9:30 a.m. Rain date is Sunday, April 8th.

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**Saturday April 21, 2012 Ceremonial Presentation!**

A blight-resistant chestnut tree will be presented to the City of Lynchburg during an Arbor Day celebration sponsored by the Lynchburg Tree Stewards and honoring Lynchburg for its Tree City USA Award. The event runs 10:00 am to 3:00 pm with the presentation ceremony at 11:00 am. **Volunteers are needed to man a table with information about TACF.**

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**Saturday April 28, 2012 Ceremonial Planting!**

A blight resistant chestnut tree will be planted during an Arbor Day celebration in the town of Purcellville in Loudoun County. The planting ceremony will take place at 11:30 a.m. at Fireman's Field, 250 South Nursery Avenue, Purcellville VA

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**May 2012 Spring Maintenance Crew needed at Fortune's Cove**

We will be organizing a tree tube maintenance party at our orchard at Fortune's Cove in Nelson County. Date and time to be announced.

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P.O. Box 158  
Marshall VA 20116