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The American Chestnut Foundation Highlighted at White House Conference on Cooperative Conservation

St. Louis, MO -- Marshal Case, President and C.E.O. of The American Chestnut Foundation (TACF), met with U. S. Department of the Interior Secretary Gale Norton at a private luncheon, along with eleven other leaders in the cooperative conservation effort to discuss partnerships they and others had formed with government and other private agencies. The luncheon took place at this week's White House Conference on Cooperative Conservation.

Famed Rolling Stones keyboardist and Georgia tree-farmer Chuck Leavell offered conference attendees an inspiring message on forest management and conservation. Chuck and his wife Rose Lane have transformed her family's property into a nationally recognized tree farm in Georgia and were named National Outstanding Tree Farmers of the Year in 1999 by the American Tree Farm System.

TACF was invited to the conference after signing an agreement with the United States Forest Service last fall. This partnership was formed, in large part, to locate American chestnut trees that have not been decimated by blight and to expand the opportunity to find the very few remaining trees that will produce materials to be used in helping restore the tree to its native forests. TACF's legion of state chapter volunteers will work with Forest Service personnel throughout the East.

Conference organizers selected a number of efforts including TACF's "that seemed especially worthwhile as examples of the cooperative conservation projects in which the Department of the Interior is involved," according to a department spokesperson.

"This conference really showcased existing cooperative conservation partnerships across the country but it also called attention to the possibility of equally innovative and creative partnerships in the future. We look forward to a long, mutually beneficial relationship with the U.S. Forest Service," said President Case.

Secretary Norton said, "Cooperative conservation is common sense conservation by people from every walk of life. It is rooted in collaborative decision-making, shared governance, and bottom-up action." Secretary Norton will meet with President Bush later to advise him of recommendations and decisions resulting from the conference. TACF's C.E.O. met with the President earlier this year during a ceremony in which an American chestnut tree was planted on the White House lawn.

President Bush, in a message to conference attendees, said, "I appreciate conference participants and all those who contribute to conservation efforts in their communities. Your commitment to excellence and dedication is making a real difference and reflects the spirit of our Nation."

This week's conference drew more than 1,200 leaders from across the nation including U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, Anthony Williams, four-term mayor of Washington, D.C., Bill Rucklshouse, the first administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency and U.S. Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns.

The American Chestnut Foundation is a non-profit organization with more than 5,000 members nationwide. For more information please visit our website at www.acf.org