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DNR AND CHESTNUT FOUNDATION SIGN AGREEMENT

As a symbol of hope for the restoration of a nearly lost icon of America's forests, representatives of Maryland Department of Natural Resources and The American Chestnut Foundation (TACF) planted an American chestnut seedling in a ceremony at Green Ridge State Forest. The American chestnut was once a dominant tree in the Appalachian forests, but was virtually wiped out by a blight fungus in the early part of the last century. Maryland State Forester Steven W. Koehn and Marshal T. Case, President and CEO of The American Chestnut Foundation, gathered on May 26th with representatives of DNR and local TACF members at the State Forest in eastern Allegany County to celebrate the signing of an historic agreement between the two organizations that would promote cooperation in research and eventual restoration of the species in Maryland.

Although TACF cooperates under a similar agreement with the US Forest Service, this is its first agreement at the state level. Maryland is in the heart of the natural range of the American chestnut, and has no national forest land. The agreement with Maryland's Department of Natural Resources (DNR) opens possibilities for research and growing blight-resistant American chestnut trees on some of the thousands of acres of Maryland State Forest land.

The American Chestnut Foundation has worked for nearly 25 years to restore the American chestnut through a program of backcross breeding. The Maryland Chapter of TACF was established in 2003, and its 300 members support a backcross breeding program to develop blight-resistant American chestnuts regionally adapted to conditions in Maryland forests. Chapter volunteers have established several American chestnut breeding orchards in Maryland, including a newly established orchard on the Monocacy Natural Resource Management Area in Frederick County.

This year marks the DNR's 100 year anniversary of caring for Maryland's forests. Maryland's first state forester, Fred W. Besley, was witness to the loss of American chestnut in Maryland to the chestnut blight. The blight fungus, *Cryphonectria parasitica*, was first identified in the United States in 1904. At that time, the American chestnut dominated the Appalachian mountaintops from Maine to Georgia. A fast-growing tree with straight-grained, rot-resistant wood, the American chestnut grew trunks as large as 19 feet in diameter. Both the wood and nuts were economically important. In less than 30 years, these forest giants had virtually disappeared, leaving forests of standing dead wood skeletons. The historic agreement between DNR and TACF opens new possibilities for the return the American chestnut in Maryland forests during the next century.

For more information:

Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Forest Service:
<http://www.dnr.state.md.us/forests>

The American Chestnut Foundation:
<http://www.acf.org>

Maryland Chapter of The American Chestnut Foundation:
<http://www.mdtacf.com>

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