



## 38 million trees destined for Appalachia

By Bill Estep  
[bestep@herald-leader.com](mailto:bestep@herald-leader.com)

Tuesday, Dec 16, 2008

A group promoting reforestation on Appalachian surface mines is taking a leading role in the United States in a campaign to plant 7 billion trees globally.

The Appalachian Regional Reforestation Initiative announced a pledge last week to plant 38 million trees in Eastern Kentucky and six nearby states in reclaimed mine areas.

The group is already more than halfway to that total. The three-year pledge counts 12.8 million trees planted in the region in 2007 and a similar amount this year, said Patrick Angel, a forester with the U.S. Office of Surface Mining based in London.

Angel said he's confident enough trees will be planted to meet the pledge by the end of 2009.

At a ceremony Thursday to mark the pledge, participants planted five American chestnut trees on Governors Island in New York.

The commitment by the Appalachian initiative is the largest in the United States toward a U.N. campaign to plant 7 billion trees worldwide by the end of 2009.

The U.N. Environment Programme started a quest in 2006 to plant a billion trees a year to counter deforestation around the globe.

A year later, a billion trees had been planted in more than 160 countries. After the number reached 2 billion in May 2008, the U.N. program raised the goal to 7 billion, or one for each person on Earth, Meryem Amar, an official with the project, said in an e-mail.

So far, more than 4 billion trees have been pledged, according to the project's Web site.

The Appalachian reforestation initiative involves the Office of Surface Mining, state regulators, the coal industry, environmental groups, scientists and landowners.

Its goal is to increase the number of high-value hardwoods being planted to reclaim mined land in Eastern Kentucky, West Virginia, Virginia, Tennessee, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Maryland.

One tree in particular the Appalachian initiative wants to restore is the American chestnut, which was once plentiful from Maine to Georgia, providing timber and food for animals and humans before a blight killed billions of the trees.

The Appalachian reforestation initiative is working with The American Chestnut Foundation to bring back the tree.

Around the world, clearing trees to make way for agriculture is a major source of deforestation, according to the United Nations.

In Appalachia, however, surface mining has eliminated more than a million acres of forest since the late 1970s, according to some estimates.

Much of that land was reclaimed as grassland or wildlife habitat with a mix of trees, shrubs and grassy areas.

One effect has been to fragment the Central Appalachian forest, one of the most biologically diverse temperate forests in the world, eliminating habitat for some species.

**Reach Bill Estep in the Somerset bureau at (606) 678-4655.**

**© 2008 Kentucky.com and wire service sources. All Rights Reserved.**

**<http://www.kentucky.com>**