

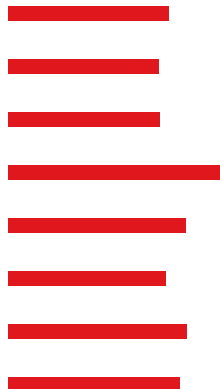


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Rare American chestnut tree discovered in Sandusky marsh

State officials reveal existence of hardwood, but won't give its exact location

Published on Tuesday, Mar 25, 2008

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Associated Press

SANDUSKY: For about seven years, the state's natural resources leaders have harbored a secret.

They still won't reveal the exact location of it or allow outsiders to see it.

This Ohio treasure's existence was closely guarded until last week, when the director of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources revealed that a full-size American chestnut tree still stands in a marsh near Lake Erie.

For tree experts, it's a big deal.

American chestnuts that grew up to 120 feet once accounted for about 25 percent of the forests in the eastern half of North America until a fungus wiped out all but a few.

"They are often referred to as the redwood of the East because of their tremendous size," said Gary Obermiller, a regional manager for the Division of Natural Areas and Preserves.

The fungus was first detected in 1904 in trees in New York City, and by 1950 some 3.5 billion trees — about 90 percent of the species — were dead.

Only a few trees had resistance to the fungus and survived.

In Ohio, most American chestnut trees were found in the eastern half of the state.

The state's largest existing chestnut tree — known only to a few until last week — is in Sheldon Marsh, a 465-acre state nature preserve about midway between Toledo and Cleveland.

The tree stands 89 feet tall and has a 5-foot circumference.

"To our knowledge, we don't have any that come close to this size," Obermiller said.

Most surviving chestnut trees are small, sprouting from the roots of trees killed by the fungus.



In this photo released by Ohio Department of Natural Resources, the state champion American chestnut is shown during the official measurements by the Division of Forestry Thursday, Jan. 31, 2008 in Sandusky, Ohio. For about seven years, the state's natural resources leaders have harbored a secret. They still won't reveal the exact location of it or allow outsiders to see it. This Ohio treasure's existence was closely guarded until last week when the director of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources revealed that a full-sized American Chestnut tree still stands in a marsh near Lake Erie. (AP Photo/ODNR Division of Forestry, Brian Riley, HO)

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