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4/12/2008 12:15:00 PM

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American chestnuts reintroduced

NELSONVILLE - For the first time in recent memory, hundreds of American chestnut seedlings are taking root in the Wayne National Forest in Southeastern Ohio, thanks to a partnership between researchers, forestry organizations and volunteers who are working to restore the once-dominant tree to its natural habitat.

More than 100 disease-resistant American chestnut seedlings recently were planted on a reclaimed strip mine site in the national forest, with plans to plant up to 600 more throughout the spring, according to a news release from Wayne officials.

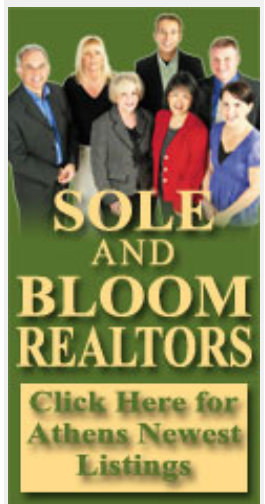
The American chestnut was nearly wiped out by a blight that killed an estimated four billion trees in the eastern United States in the early 20th century. The naturally surviving trees remain vulnerable to the fungus; however, through years of cross-breeding with its disease-resistant counterpart, the Chinese chestnut, researchers are seeking to develop a blight-resistant American chestnut.

The American Chestnut Foundation's backcross breeding program produces seed that combines the disease-resistant traits of the Chinese chestnut with the superior size and timber traits of the American chestnut. In order for the seedlings to grow in the poor soil conditions of reclaimed mines, U.S. Forest Service researchers inoculate the chestnut seedlings with mycorrhizal fungi that will aid in the survival, growth and development of the seedlings.

"Mycorrhizal fungi play a vital role in reforestation by providing the plant several benefits that are critical for its



Ohio University professor Brian McCarthy inspects one of the hybrid American chestnut trees from the U.S. Forest Service Research Lab before it's planted in the Wayne National Forest.



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survival and growth in a nutrient-poor and hostile environment such as in reclaimed mined sites," said Shiv Hiremath, a Forest Service biologist in Delaware, Ohio. "Reintroduction of this species will serve both reforestation efforts of reclaimed lands as well as restoration of the American Chestnut tree."

The re-establishment of native vegetation like the American chestnut and American elm has been made a priority for the Wayne National Forest, officials said. In the Wayne's 2006 Land and Resource Management Plan, it lists the initiative to promote the planting of disease-resistant species in the Wayne as varieties become available.

The recent plantings of American chestnut seedlings were done by workers and volunteers from the Wayne National Forest, The American Chestnut Foundation's Ohio Chapter, Ohio University's Department of Environmental and Plant Biology and researchers from the U.S. Forest Research Lab in Delaware.

Reader Comments

Posted: Monday, April 14, 2008
 Article comment by: [Frank Carroll](#)

Very heartening to hear about the restoration of this important forest giant in the Mid West. Thanks for covering the American Chestnut's resurgence.

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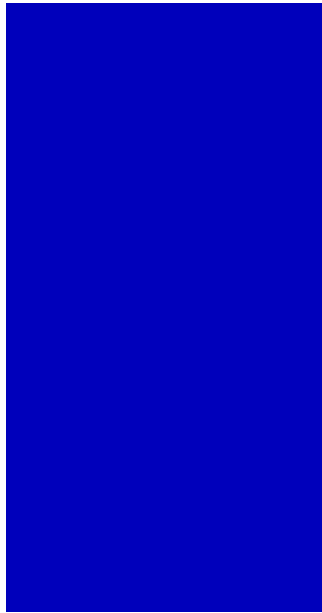
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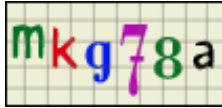
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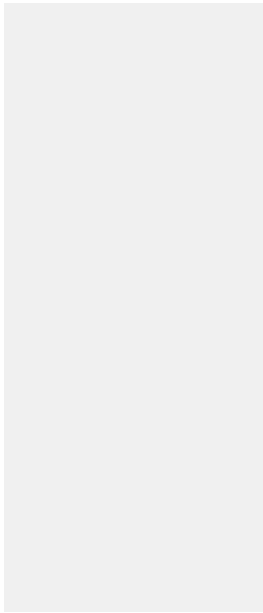
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