



The mission of The Nature Conservancy is to preserve the plants, animals and natural communities that represent the diversity of life on Earth by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive.

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Arbor Day Comes to the North Cumberland Wildlife Management Area

American Chestnut Trees and Other Hardwoods to Be Planted

Nashville, TN — March 13, 2009 — One of Tennessee's showcase conservation areas will get a spring touch-up at the end of March.

The 138,000-acre North Cumberland Wildlife Management Area — whose hardwood forests were protected in 2007 as part of Tennessee's [largest single conservation transaction](#) since the Great Smoky Mountains National Park — will be the site of a significant tree planting project to reclaim decades-old strip mines on Saturday, March 28. Volunteers who wish to assist in the planting are invited to join the day-long event.

"We're calling this our celebration of Arbor Day," said Alex Wyss, The Nature Conservancy's Cumberlands Program Director. "It's an opportunity for people to get out in the Cumberland Mountains, experience one of Tennessee's best-kept secrets and help improve the area at the

same time. Also, from a conservation perspective, this is an important demonstration project for the Cumberland Plateau. It will show that hardwood trees can reclaim former strip mines and ultimately mature into a healthy forest habitat for plants, wildlife and natural communities."

Approximately 1,200 native hardwood seedlings will be planted on the North Cumberland WMA site. The two-acre site is located in the Cumberland Mountains, on the border of Scott and Morgan counties in the area drained by the New River and includes the headwaters of Smoky Creek. Immediately adjacent to this area are properties that were also protected in the 2007 "[Connecting the Cumberlands](#)" conservation project: a property managed by Conservation Forestry LLC and new land that was added to Frozen Head State Park and Natural Area. The planting site is also near the footpath of the Cumberland Trail State Park.

Notably, over 100 pure American chestnut seedlings will be planted on this project. The American chestnut was the dominant hardwood tree in east Tennessee and along the [Cumberland Plateau](#), prior to a devastating invasion by the chestnut blight in the early 20th century which effectively wiped out the species in America's forests. The [American Chestnut Foundation](#) has been working for the past 30 years to breed blight-resistant strains of American chestnut. Over the next several years, this planting and others like it throughout Appalachia will provide valuable information about planting



[A view of the North Cumberland WMA, where the trees will be planted](#)
Photo © Katherine Medlock/TNC

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techniques and site requirements necessary for successful establishment of the blight-resistant chestnut on reclaimed mine land.

The planting is being conducted under the auspices of the Office of Surface Mining, Knoxville Field Office and the Appalachian Regional Reforestation Initiative, a mining reclamation program designed to encourage establishment of native hardwood forests on reclaimed mine land by using the Forestry Reclamation Approach. Sponsors for the March 28 program include The Nature Conservancy, the Office of Surface Mining, Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, the Tennessee Division of Forestry, Lexington Coal Company, Triple H Coal, the Tennessee Chapter of the American Chestnut Foundation, the Coal Creek Foundation, Tennessee State Parks and the Friends of Cumberland Trail State Park. Lexington Coal Company, which is not associated with the former coal mines on the property, is donating a bulldozer and other equipment for the planting.

For more information about volunteering for this event, contact Andrew Schmidt at The Nature Conservancy's Knoxville office, (865) 544-7200; andrew_schmidt@tnc.org.

The Nature Conservancy is a leading conservation organization working around the world to protect ecologically important lands and waters for nature and people. The Conservancy and its more than 1 million members have protected nearly 120 million acres worldwide. [Visit The Nature Conservancy on the Web at www.nature.org](http://www.nature.org).

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