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Innovative Project Brings American Chestnuts Back to Old Mine Lands

The American Chestnut Foundation (TACF) announced today a new initiative to restore the American chestnut tree to sites previously mined for coal. This project, in partnership with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will open a new chapter for forestry and wildlife conservation in the Appalachian coal region.

NRCS Chief, Dave White is enthusiastic about the new project: "As partners with The American Chestnut Foundation," says White, "we can develop more and better conservation tools that can expand our conservation portfolio to benefit farmers, ranchers and private forest landowners."

There is currently an estimated $\frac{3}{4}$ million acres of previously mined land that could be returned to healthy forests," says TACF president and CEO Bryan Burhans. "Much of this land can be restored to high quality hardwood forests to provide valuable habitat for wildlife and valuable timber resources to support rural Appalachian communities.

In addition to the NRCS, the Chestnut Foundation will work with the Appalachian Regional Reforestation Initiative (ARRI) to locate old mine lands owned by private landowners in Pennsylvania, Ohio, West Virginia, Virginia and Kentucky. The project will work to reforest sites using high-quality native hardwood species that include potentially blight-resistant chestnut trees recently developed by TACF.

"This \$1.1 million project is poised to make a big difference in the eastern US coal region," says Dr. Patrick Angel with the US Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement and a major driving force in ARRI. "The ARRI science team along with TACF scientists have invested many decades of research to develop innovate techniques to return the mine sites back to diverse, healthy, productive forests."

Over the next three years, project cooperators will reforest 12 sites. The project faces challenges, however. “Many soils on mine sites in the region are compacted to the point where trees are unable to establish a root system,” says Angel. However, Angel and cooperating scientists have developed unique and highly effective methods to prepare these sites for successful reforestation. These sites will demonstrate an innovative approach to not only reintroducing the American chestnut, but return these lands to healthy forest ecosystems.

Adding the American chestnut to the planting mix represents a historical milestone. The American chestnut was hit by a disease, called the chestnut blight, over 100 years ago that eradicated matured chestnuts from our forests. Today, American chestnuts are commonly found throughout the eastern US, but as small saplings that eventually die back from the chestnut blight.

TACF is planting their first line of potentially blight-resistant chestnuts on these sites, the result of over 28 years of research and development. The reintroduction of the American chestnut to our forests represents a real opportunity for private landowners. The American chestnut once provided valuable timber and high quality food for wildlife. Providing private landowners with high quality forests that provide clean air, protect our water supply, and support diverse wildlife populations is not only a benefit to the private landowner, but to our communities and our nation.

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