WHAT: American Chestnut Reforestation Planting
WHERE: Nantahala National Forest
WHEN: Saturday, December 1, 2012

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 29, 2012

The American Chestnut Foundation Plants 200 Potentially Blight-resistant American Chestnut Trees in Nantahala National Forest

Nantahala, NC

On Saturday, December 1, 2012, The American Chestnut Foundation (TACF) volunteers and scientists will collaborate with the US Forest Service to plant 200 potentially blight-resistant American chestnut seedlings in Nantahala National Forest. These seedlings are called Restoration Chestnuts 1.0 and are part of TACF’s unique restoration program to return the American chestnut to its native range.

This planting is part of TACF’s larger project to plant and monitor more than 4,000 American chestnuts in six National Forests in the eastern United States funded in part by a $20,264 grant awarded to TACF from the National Forest Foundation’s 2012 Matching Awards Program.

Planting American chestnuts on national forest lands fulfills an important goal of the US Forest Service to restore native trees to our forests. American chestnuts once made up 25% of the eastern hardwood forests, but were nearly wiped out by the chestnut blight in the twentieth century. American chestnuts will benefit the health of the forests by creating more diverse ecosystems and providing nutritious food for wildlife.

“Being in a position to help restore the American chestnut is the professional opportunity of a lifetime,” said Paul Berra, regional geneticist for US Forest Service Eastern Region (R9). “The collaboration of the National Forest Foundation with The American Chestnut Foundation and the US Forest Service makes it possible to be more successful at this important work than any one of us could be alone.”
Once considered the “King” of the eastern forests, American chestnuts stood up to 100 feet tall, and numbered in the billions. They were a vital part of the forest ecology, a key food source for wildlife and an essential component of the human economy. In 1904 the fungal pathogen responsible for chestnut blight, accidentally imported from Asia, spread rapidly through the American chestnut population. By 1950 it had killed virtually all the mature trees from Maine to Georgia. Several attempts to breed blight resistant trees in the mid-1900s were unsuccessful.

Then in 1983, a dedicated group of scientists formed The American Chestnut Foundation and began a special breeding process, which in 2005 produced the first potentially blight-resistant trees called Restoration Chestnuts 1.0. Now assisted by nearly 6,000 members and volunteers in 23 states, the organization is undertaking the planting of Restoration Chestnuts 1.0 in select locations throughout the eastern US as part of the Foundation’s early restoration efforts.

TACF is a 501(c) (3) conservation organization headquartered in Asheville, NC. For more information on TACF and their work to restore the American chestnut tree, contact Paul Franklin at (828)713-9547 email: pfranklin@acf.org. Or visit www.acf.org.

Press contact:
Tom Saielli
Southeast Regional Science Coordinator
The American Chestnut Foundation
828-450-9100
tom@acf.org