FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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The American Chestnut Foundation Begins Historically Largest Project to Establish American Chestnut Trees on Reclaimed Mine Lands

Schuylkill County, PA

On Friday, April 27, The American Chestnut Foundation (TACF) will complete the planting of more than 1,000 potentially blight-resistant American chestnuts with other mixed hardwood trees on 22 acres of a reclaimed coal mine site in Schuylkill County, PA. TACF’s potentially blight-resistant American chestnuts are the result of more than 28 years of careful breeding and research by TACF’s Scientists in an effort to restore this native tree.

The planting in Schuylkill County kicks off a large-scale, multi-year project by TACF to reforest 12 reclaimed mine sites throughout five states (PA, OH, WV, VA, KY) funded in part by a Conservation Innovation Grant from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS). Over three years, Approximately 250,000 seedlings, including more than 14,000 blight-resistant America chestnuts will be planted by TACF and project cooperators on a total of 360 acres. This project is the largest planting of potentially blight-resistant American chestnut trees in the Foundation’s history and marks a milestone in the restoration of this once dominant native tree.

Assisting in the April 27 planting are volunteers from Northern Swatara Creek Watershed Association, Schuylkill Headwaters Association, employees of the Schuylkill County Municipal Authority (the current landowner), and TACF. Executive Director of Schuylkill County Municipal Authority, Pat Caulfield says, “We are proud to be a partner in such a worthwhile project.”
endeavor and offer sincere gratitude to all of the participants for their diligent efforts in this restoration project.”

Michael French of The American Chestnut Foundation says, “This NRCS grant is allowing us to demonstrate how chestnuts and high value hardwoods can return mine sites to a healthy forest, and also to improve water quality and wildlife habitat.”

NRCS Chief, Dave White is enthusiastic about the 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.”

Initially mined by Michael Coal Company on lands formerly owned by the Tremont Water and Gas Company, the site in Schuylkill County was reclaimed several years ago in the traditional post-Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act (post-SMCRA) manner and was heavily compacted and seeded with non-native grasses. The site had already been planted with seedlings, but due to downstream sedimentation and runoff concerns, the Schuylkill County Municipal Authority, representatives from The Appalachian Regional Reforestation Initiative and TACF suggested an alternative reclamation method. In preparation for this planting, Michael Coal Company prepared the land using the Forestry Reclamation Approach (FRA), a method which breaks up the compacted soil so that trees can grow successfully. This method also allows water to infiltrate the ground more easily and releases it more slowly from the site.

Once the mighty giants 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, a 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.

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 almost 6,000 members and volunteers in 23 states, the organization is undertaking the planting of Restoration Chestnuts 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.