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American Chestnut Foundation announces new leadership

ASHEVILLE, NC – The American Chestnut Foundation (TACF) has appointed Lisa Thomson as its President & CEO. The Foundation’s Board of Directors unanimously ratified the decision of its Executive Committee earlier this month after a national search. A lifelong conservationist, Thomson’s previous experience includes 28 years at The Nature Conservancy, serving in leadership capacities in conservation land management and fundraising. Most recently, she served as Associate Vice President for Development at Rollins College in Winter Park, Florida, where she was recruited in 2010 to help lead their recently launched capital campaign.

“We are extremely pleased that Lisa Thomson is joining us as CEO,” said Kim Steiner, Chair of the Board of TACF. “She instinctively grasps the appeal and urgency of our mission, and her energy and enthusiasm match perfectly with TACF’s ambitious conservation goals.”

American chestnut was a keystone species throughout its range in the eastern United States. It also had exceptional economic and cultural significance to rural Americans. At the beginning of the 20th century, a fungal disease was accidentally imported from Asia, and the blight spread rapidly throughout eastern forests. By the 1950s, virtually nothing remained of the species other than occasional seedlings and small sprouts.

In 1983, a committed group of scientists decided to do something about this ecological disaster while the species could still be saved. They formed TACF to initiate a complex breeding program to transfer genes containing disease resistance from Asian chestnut species to American chestnut. In just 20 years, these talented scientists and volunteers began to produce the first generation of trees that are 96% American chestnut but contain Asiatic genes for blight resistance. Now supported by more than 5,000 members and hundreds of volunteers in 23 states, the organization is planting and testing offspring of those trees as it continues to build
and improve its breeding population. With the aid of many partner organizations, TACF is leading the restoration of an iconic species once on the brink of extinction.

“This amazing organization has ensured the magnificent American chestnut will return to its historic range, from Maine to Alabama. Dedicated scientists, volunteers, staff and board members have worked tirelessly for years to bring back the American chestnut for our children and grandchildren to enjoy. I am honored to join them in this extraordinary effort,” stated Thomson.

The American Chestnut Foundation is a non-profit conservation organization headquartered in Asheville, NC, with 3 regional offices located in Charlottesville, VA, So. Burlington, VT, and State College, PA. The organization’s research farm in Meadowview, VA has more than 50,000 trees planted in various stages of development. For more information on TACF and its work, contact TACF Director of Communications Ruth Goodridge at 828-281-0047, email: ruth.goodridge@acf.org. Visit us at www.acf.org or on Facebook at http://www.facebook.com/americanchestnut and Twitter at http://www.twitter.com/chestnut1904.