WHAT: Training Workshop for American Chestnut Restoration and Surface Mine Reforestation
WHEN: April 17, 2014 from 6:00pm – 8:30pm
WHERE: Bell County Courthouse 3rd Floor Meeting Room, 101 Courthouse Square, Pineville, KY 40977

The American Chestnut Foundation’s Historically Largest Project to Establish American Chestnut Trees on Reclaimed Mine Lands Expands to Bell County, KY

Bell County, KY

On Thursday, April 17, 2014 from 6:00pm – 8:30pm, The American Chestnut Foundation (TACF) will be hosting a training workshop at the Bell County Courthouse in Pineville, KY. Anyone interested in learning about American chestnut restoration, opportunities for surface mine reforestation, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Programs, The American Chestnut Foundation’s (TACF) breeding program, and volunteer opportunities with TACF is invited to attend the evening program. This workshop will inform attendees about American chestnut history and biology and TACF’s efforts to restore this tree to our forests. Attendees will also learn about opportunities for landowner assistance for reforesting surface mines and surface mine reclamation and reforestation techniques.

Following the training, on April 18, TACF members and local area volunteers will plant approximately 625 potentially blight-resistant American chestnuts on one acre of a reclaimed coal mine site in Bell County. TACF’s potentially blight-resistant American chestnuts are the result of more than 30 years of careful breeding and research by TACF’s scientists in an effort to restore this native tree.

The planting in Bell County is a continuation of a large-scale, multi-year project by TACF to reforest 12 reclaimed mine sites throughout five states (PA, OH, WV, VA, and KY) funded in part by a Conservation Innovation Grant from the 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.

“This NRCS grant is allowing us to demonstrate how chestnuts and high value hardwoods can return mine sites to healthy forests, improve water quality, and enhance wildlife habitat,” said TACF Forester Michael French. “Persons wishing to assist with the surface mine reclamation planting in Bell County on April 18, or with subsequent monitoring of the planting, are particularly encouraged to attend the April 17 workshop at the Bell County Courthouse.” Prospective volunteers who cannot attend the talk can email or call French at (812) 447-3285 or michael@acf.org.
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 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 Mila Kirkland at (828)281-0047 or email: mila@acf.org. Or visit www.acf.org.