WHAT: Planting of potentially blight-resistant American Chestnuts
WHEN: Saturday, February 7 at 11 a.m.
WHERE: Harmon Field Park, Tryon, NC 28782

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 28, 2015

Memorial Planting of Rare, Potentially Blight-resistant American Chestnut Trees at Harmon Field

Tryon, NC – On Saturday, February 7 at 11:00 a.m., The American Chestnut Foundation (TACF) will direct a memorial planting of four potentially blight-resistant American chestnut trees at Harmon Field Park in Tryon, NC. The chestnut seedlings, called Restoration Chestnuts 1.0, are part of a unique breeding program led by TACF to restore the American chestnut to the eastern forests of the United States. This planting is a living memorial to Mara Smith, local photographer and writer, who died February 5, 2014. The event is free and open to the general public.

Once a dominant species in the eastern U.S., the American chestnut tree reigned over 200 million acres of eastern woodlands from Maine to Georgia, from the Piedmont plateau in the Carolinas west to the Ohio Valley, until a lethal fungus functionally eliminated it from the landscape during the first half of the 20th century.

Anyone interested in planting trees and learning more about American chestnut restoration is encouraged to attend this special event. Participants are asked to meet at 11:00 a.m. at Harmon Field Park, on Harmon Field Road. The best access is to park behind the Tryon Arts and Crafts Building. Walk across the bridge toward the maintenance shed; the planting will be on the left side of the path. As part of the event, there will be a talk on American Chestnut history and ecology, and TACF’s efforts to restore the species.

“Ceremonial plantings like this one are significant for the restoration of the species,” said TACF Regional Science Coordinator Thomas Saielli. “They allow us to share the story of the American Chestnut and generate interest from local citizens to join in our efforts.”
Once the mighty giants of the eastern forests, American Chestnuts stood up to 100 feet tall and numbered in the billions. This iconic species was a vital part of the forest ecology, a key food source for wildlife, and an essential component of the economy. In 1904 the fungal pathogen responsible for chestnut blight was accidentally imported from Asia, and the blight spread rapidly through the American Chestnut population. By 1950 it 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, backcross breeding, 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 16 state chapters, the organization is undertaking the planting of Restoration Chestnuts 1.0 in select locations throughout the eastern U.S. as part of the Foundation’s early restoration efforts.

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.


**For more information about the planting event, contact:**
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