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CHESTNUT GETS NEW LEASE ON LIFE AT PHILPOTT LAKE THANKS TO CORPS

On March 18th when Virginia chapter members gather at Philpott Lake to celebrate the first planting of American chestnut on a U.S. Army Corps of



Danny & Susan Martin with a tree

Engineers site, they will be greeting new TACF President Bryan Burhans, and officials from a host of local and regional organizations eager to re-connect with a key component of healthy Piedmont forest.

What won't be visible are the hidden roots behind this event,

for they rest with Philpott Forest Ranger Danny Martin's grandparents, and to the dead chestnut trees in the woods surrounding his great grandmother's house.

Now Danny shares responsibility for protecting 7,000 acres of forest that surround the lake, but he comes from a long line of woodsmen and sawyers. By the time he was 3 or 4, he was tagging along as his granddad worked the woods of western Henry and Patrick counties. Even then he was struck by the stories about how his family suffered when the chestnuts they depended on for timber and animal forage dwindled and disappeared. Tales of wagonloads of nuts shipped from Bassett, and the lingering timber harvest from dead trees cut both ways... a painful reminder of plenty past.

When Danny went off to study engineering, the blasted stumps stuck in his mind, sentinels and reminders of an apparently irretrievable loss.

But then, in the early 70's, while working near Fairy Stone State Park as a seasonal ranger, Danny stumbled on an anomaly, a diseased, but huge American chestnut of 38 inch diameter.. Nearby were a scattering of smaller trees, some living. He reported the tree, now dead, to Patrick County Forest Warden Kennon Clark. And he began to wonder just how dead they were.

Fast forward to this past October! Danny and his wife, Susan, also a Ranger at Philpott, were in Asheville, NC, at a festival to mark the city's importance as the cradle of forestry in the Southeast. There they met Meghan Jordan, manning the American Chestnut Foundation booth; and there, discoveries of remnant trees throughout the years snapped into a sharper and more hopeful focus.

They became members, trolled through the acf.org website, and started thinking hard how the Corps' mission to promote forest health around flood damage control lakes like Philpott might fit with a public program to renew interest in healthy chestnut.

Soon after they got back to the 56-year old recreational facility, Danny and Susan re-surveyed stump shoots on high ridges over the lake, a clear indicator that those parts of Patrick, Henry and Franklin counties had been chestnut habitat. He sold the idea of a permanent 3 panel display on chestnut at the visitor facility. And he started to think about planting an advanced backcross tree likely to live and encourage efforts to find and breed American chestnut throughout the area.

"Because there were so few ceremonial trees, I just thought it would be neat if we could make a planting the focus of education efforts.", he



The President's Message

As I write this, the days are getting appreciably longer. It's still cold, but the trees' long sleep is nearly over. So the Virginia Chapter is frantically gearing up

for planting season and to scour the land for more trees and more money to support our program.

We are on track to plant at least 6 orchards by mid April: filling out the 2 we started last year and starting 4 or 5 new ones. Two or three of the new orchards will be breeding orchards for advanced back-cross nuts harvested in 2008 from trees in Clarke, Fairfax and Fauquier Counties. Two will be planted 100% in American chestnuts also harvested in 2008 from local survivors. Negotiations with all landowners are still underway, but we will announce the new locations as soon as they are certain.

We have set an ambitious chapter goal of trying to locate every large surviving American tree in the state. That means enlisting people all over in the search. Last summer's intern put some great materials on how to identify chestnuts and what to do when you find one on the chapter Website, vatacf.org. We are promoting the goal by speaking to local groups and clubs, setting up exhibits at local events, and publishing stories in local newspapers and magazines. We already have a list of surviving American trees that are producing nuts. Each of these needs to be evaluated for suitability as new sources of genetic material for the breeding program. The

Virginia Department of Forestry has offered to let us enter the data on their forestry data base, making it accessible statewide.

In order to entice people to donate their time to planting, identifying, pollinating and harvesting trees, we are putting together three special training programs. First, on March 12, is a program for orchard stewards...those people who are managing or volunteering to work in the orchards. The morning session will be conducted by Sara Fitzsimmons and Robert Strasser, TACF regional scientists, at the Smithsonian National Zoological Park's Conservation and Research Center near Front Royal. After lunch, we will make a field trip to Roland Farm, one of the orchards we planted last year. We have limited the number of participants in this program, so if you would like to come, please call or email the VA TACF office soon.

Closer to the time trees flower, we will be training volunteers how to hand pollinate them. The date and location for this program have not been determined, but it will be in late spring. The third program we are developing is training on how to collect and preserve herbarium samples of the American chestnuts that are sources of genetic material. Again, the date and location for this program have not been determined.

In order to entice people even more, we have arranged to have the Virginia Department of Forestry germinate some of our precious American chestnuts as a thank you present for our 2009 volunteers.

We prefer to use email to notify people about these programs, so if you are not already getting emails from VATACF and want to hear about volunteer and training opportunities, please share your email address with us.

NOW IS THE TIME FOR ALL GOOD MEN , (AND WOMEN), TO COME TO THE AID OF THE PARTY

The inoculation party that is... a five day fest that Elderhostel offers from May 31 to June 5 on our Meadowview Research Farm near Abingdon..

This year slow response threatened to cancel the event when Will Stein of the Holston Rivers chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalists came to the rescue, offering to have his next training class take on this project to fulfill their 40 hour requirement for certification. He contacted local Coordinator Sandra Fisher at safishe3@vt.edu

But don't be deterred. the more the merrier. If you are interested in joining the Elderhostel program to add in plays, local tours and a stay at the Southwest Regional Coop Extension Center, check our website, or contact Sam.

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At season's close, Danny went into high gear, gaining permission to plant an advanced backcross from TACF Southern Regional and state staff, and contacting area stakeholders among public agencies and private groups interested in forest health.

Master Naturalists, geo-cachers, Nature Conservancy, Virginia Dept. of Forestry and local politicians from the four counties that surround the lake were invited by the Corps of Engineers to mark the re-introduction at 11 am, Wednesday, March 18, just ahead of the Spring Equinox.

When the -year old seedling gets planted high above the lake, Daniel Brown of the Wilmington

THE YEAR OF THE ORCHARDS

Some projects take a while to ripen, then take off when forces converge in just the right way. That's the situation the Virginia chapter finds itself in this year. At least 3 new orchards will come on line this year, more than doubling the committment of time and funds needed by staff and our volunteers.

Look at the adjacent calendar to see when new plantings at UVA's Blandy Research Farm in Boyce, and the Smithsonian's Conservation Resource Center near Front Royal are interwoven with infill work at Mt. Zion in Aldie, and Roland Farm near The Plains.

We may also add two research plots on private land in Fairfax and Fauquier, not mention three or four serious offers on land in Rappahannock, Orange, and Madison and Albemarle counties that are now being evaluated for 2010.

What is certain is that chestnut orchards need water to be fruitful. Donors commit money and staff time each year.

Your willingness to donate expertise, time, or financial support to projects near you are just as essential. Dream no small dreams!

District of the Corps of Engineers will speak, followed by Bryan Burhans

Fittingly, Danny Martin will be doing the introducing and directing the planting. Here roots and memories run deep enough to influence the future.

Members who want to attend the ceremony and have a chance to meet TACF's new leader should respond to susan.t.martin@usace.mil or call 276 629-4512, ext.226.

The program and directions from Roanoke and Greensboro will be found on the VATACF website at vatacf.org

2009 VA TACF March - August Calendar			
March			
* RD is rain date			
12 at 9 am	Front Royal		Orchard Steward Training
18 at 11 am	near Bassett		Tree planting Philpott Lake
19	Boyce		Blandy orchard prep
26 at 10 am	Boyce		Blandy planting
*28 /29 RD at 10 or 1pm	Aldie,		Mt. Zion planting
April			
*4/5RD at 10 am or 1 pm	The Plains		Roland Farm planting
*14/15 RD 10 am or 1 pm	Front Royal		CRC planting
17-18	Meadowview		TACF BOD Meeting
18 at 11am	Leesburg 'Oatlands'		Arbor Day Festival
18 at 10am	Midlothian		Earth Day Exhibit
24 at 9 am	Douthat State Park, Bath		Earth Day Festival
25 from 1 to 5 pm	Boyce		Blandy Arbor Day
May			
8 eve., 9-10 at 9 am	Boyce		Blandy Garden Fair exhibit
15 at 7 pm	Charlottesville - TBA		Orchard Party w/ new CEO
& 16 at 1 pm	Va. Dept of Forestry		Public seminar
30 at 10 am	Lesesne State Forest		Field Day
31 to 5th June	Meadowview Research		Volunteers inoculate trees
June			
2nd week through 3rd week	statewide		Bagging & Pollination
July			
Entire month	statewide		Orchard monitoring & care
August			
22 to be announced	Shenandoah Nat. Park		Science symposium w/ NPS
Week of 25	Marshall		Fall Bur mailed

LOCAL VOLUNTEERS ARE VITAL TO OUR EXPANDING ORCHARD PLANS



Help us grow!

Please take a moment to read our very full schedule to find coming events in your area; and

plan now to attend and become a part of our ambitious efforts.

Chapter officials and Board members are working hard to help local groups form and get trained prior to the Spring planting season that starts March 15 .

The March 12 training session in Marshall is within an hour's drive of Rappahannock, Madison, Orange, Fairfax, and Clarke counties, where landowners have contacted us to propose backcross orchards as a result of presentations this past winter.

Farther south, Charlottesville will serve as a focal point for an orchard now being planned for 2010. Training sessions for orchard owners and local groups who want to help will be added as we respond to your interest.



Not everyone has to wield a shovel. Attending our fundraising dinner on May 15 is a good way to help pay for fencing, orchard supplies, and staff salaries for our biologist, and this summer's interns. Meet our new CEO Bryan Burhans.

Watch the website for new opportunities in your area. Scout your surroundings for accessible trees. Ask us for local chestnut contacts . Work with new friends who share your passion to restore this tree



THE
AMERICAN
CHESTNUT
FOUNDATION

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WE NEED A VOLUNTEER WILLING TO UPDATE OUR VATACF.ORG WEBSITE ON A REGULAR BASIS. CLICK ON!