



# THE BUR

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Newsletter of the New York State Chapter of The American Chestnut Foundation

Spring 2022

*Another Significant Achievement by ESF:*

## The ‘DarWin’ American Chestnut A New Line of Transgenic Blight Tolerant Trees

*by John Neumann, NY-TACF Secretary and Vice President for Education*

‘DarWin’ is the newest line of transgenic blight-tolerant American chestnut trees since 2015, when Darling 58, the world’s first proven line of transgenic blight-tolerant trees, was announced. The Darling 58 trees have a version of the *oxalate oxidase* gene (*OxO*) that is enhanced all the time. The ‘DarWin’ trees, on the other hand, have a version of *OxO* that is reduced most of the time but activates when blight infections occur. This is accomplished using a genetic regulatory element from poplar called the “win” promoter. (The “Win” part of the ‘DarWin’ name comes from this “Wound inducible” promoter.) One motivation for developing this new line of trees is to save the tree energy, since it only produces oxalate oxidase when wounded. Not only does this give the tree a better chance to survive, but it now has the tools to efficiently compete with other tree species and reclaim its territory.

### **Another science breakthrough:**

The new ‘DarWin’ line of transgenic blight-tolerant American chestnut is another scientific breakthrough and significant achievement by the ESF American Chestnut Research and Restoration Project. Our NY Chapter is grateful for these achievements and our partnership with the ESF team since our mutual beginning in 1990.

### **What’s in a name?**

ESF’s American Chestnut Project came up with a most fitting name for this new

line of transgenic trees. While the tree is pronounced Darwin, as in Charles Darwin, the father of evolutionary science, it is written as ‘DarWin’ to show it is basically the Darling<sup>1</sup> tree (Dar) with the Wound-inducible promoter (Win). It has the Ellis<sup>2</sup> American chestnut background, like the Darling trees. Referring to the name Darwin also alludes to the idea that these blight-tolerant American chestnut trees are evolving one step at a time.

### **Developing the ‘DarWin’:**

Like the original Darling 58, the ‘DarWin’ was developed by the ESF American Chestnut Project through cutting-edge biotechnology. The original *win-OxO* vector was constructed by Kathleen Baier under Dr. William Powell’s direction and the trees were transformed by Linda McGuigan. Kristen Stewart and Tobi Culpepper did some testing along the way, and Erik Carlson brought the project to fruition and tested the expression and blight-tolerance. (Erik earned his Master’s degree at ESF under Dr. Powell and is continuing the *win-OxO* project as a PhD student). It takes a team to accomplish these breakthroughs and our chapter remains immensely proud of the ESF team throughout our 32-year partnership.

### **Current work:**

The ESF team is now involved with outcrossing ‘DarWin’ to different mother trees. Currently, this new line is being propagated in tissue culture and planted in field sites under USDA permits. Plantlets



A ‘DarWin’ chestnut tree producing male (catkins) and female flowers in a high-light growth chamber.

in high-light growth chambers are producing pollen for future controlled crosses with wild type American chestnut mother trees. These trees will serve as an additional source of blight-tolerance in future restoration efforts, alongside the Darling 58 trees.

*(Continued on page 5)*

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Founded in 1990, the New York State Chapter (NY-TACF) is the oldest chapter of The American Chestnut Foundation, Inc., a non-profit 501(c)(3) membership organization. NY-TACF, in partnership with the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry (ESF), is working to restore the American chestnut tree to our eastern forests by developing truly blight-tolerant American chestnut trees through biotechnology. Membership information may be found on the back page of *The Bur*.

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(Terms End at the 2023 Annual Meeting)

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\*Executive Committee

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Linda McGuigan – *The Bur* Editor



**President’s Message**

Despite all the crazy happenings around the world, the outlook for restoring a truly blight-tolerant American chestnut into the forest looks very positive and closer by the day.

As you read through this spring issue of *The Bur*, I hope you feel as uplifted and positive as I am.

The approval process has been a long journey, but it looks like we have an approval date of August 2023. The NOI 2021-16771, written by the USDA APHIS BRS (Federal Register 8/6/2021, [federalregister.gov/d/2021-16771](http://federalregister.gov/d/2021-16771)) gives us the timeline. They state

"As part of the decision-making process regarding the petition, we are preparing a plant pest risk assessment (PPRA) and the EIS that is the subject of this notice. We plan to complete the PPRA within 6 months, and the EIS and record of decision (ROD) within 2 years of the date of this notice. This schedule is tentative and subject to extension."

Last year was great for nut production and we hand pollinated flowers using blight-tolerant pollen to produce thousands of blight-tolerant nuts. Those nuts are being used for accelerated pollen production and/or blight-tolerant seedling production. Some of the seedlings will be distributed to members to plant in Mother tree orchards. Others will be planted in NPOs, or Nut Production Orchards. We need NPOs to have high quantities of blight-tolerant trees for true restoration. Anyone interested in planting an NPO or for more information on the program, please contact me.

On page 1, you will see information on a new transgenic tree produced by ESF, the ‘DarWin’. This tree will not replace the Darling 58, but will supplement it, giving us just one more resource to help with restoration.

ESF also had a trial hand pollination program last summer, where wild-type pollen was sent to a small group of people who had flowering American chestnut trees. This program will continue again this year, and anyone interested in becoming familiar with the hand pollinating process should contact Hannah Pilkey at [hcpilkey@esf.edu](mailto:hcpilkey@esf.edu).

On another very positive note, our membership has increased from 905 in December 2020 to 999 in December 2021. I feel this is a direct result of people seeing the promise of restoration with the transgenic Darling 58 and because our members are an integral part of this restoration program. A very large number of our members have been planting Mother trees or helping in other ways such as with hand pollination, orchard maintenance, bur harvesting, or education.

I often have people ask if they can help cover the cost of mailing nuts to them for use in a mother tree orchard. I tell them that the real investment will be made by them planting, fertilizing, mowing, protecting, and maintaining their trees. Those are investment we could never replace or duplicate and I sincerely want to thank all members who have invested time and effort into this historic restoration program.

As Herb Darling, our President Emeritus for Life, would say, “Long live the American Chestnut!”

Allen Nichols  
 President, NY-TACF  
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# Stop the Spread of the Asian Chestnut Gall Wasp in New York State

By Chris Johnston, ESF Graduate Student, Master's Degree

The Asian chestnut gall wasp (ACGW) is an invasive insect considered to be one of the most destructive pests to chestnut trees around the world. This species induces gall formation on almost all species of chestnut trees (including American, Asiatic species, and their hybrids). Galling is detrimental to leaf, shoot, and nut production and can ultimately lead to tree mortality. First introduced in Georgia in 1974, today this species can be found in 17 states throughout the historic American chestnut range. New York is currently the most northern edge of the invasion front, with infested sites in Albany, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Dutchess, Erie, Monroe, Nassau, Niagara, Onondaga, Oswego, Putnam, Schuylers, Suffolk, Tompkins, Westchester, Wyoming, and Ulster Counties. Although prevalent in southeastern and southwestern New York, the species is not yet ubiquitous throughout the state's documented American chestnut range. With plans to introduce blight-tolerant American chestnuts throughout this range, chestnut growers must do their part in documenting and preventing the dispersal of this forest pest.

Luckily, the introduced parasitoid wasp *Torymus sinensis* is an effective biological control, as it parasitizes ACGW larvae before they can emerge from the galls. Although *T. sinensis* has been successful in reducing populations of ACGW in other parts of the world, it has not been as effective in the U.S. This is in part due to the movement of ACGW-infested plant material beyond the range of *T. sinensis*, which in turn delays this species from locating new infestations. For *T. sinensis* to attain efficacy comparable to that seen in other countries, chestnut growers must take the proper precautions to prevent the movement of the gall wasp beyond its current invasion front.

## How To Help

### DO:

- **Grow chestnuts from seed.** ACGW cannot be spread through nuts or burs.
- **Plant ACGW-resistant *Castanea* varieties** (*C. ozarkensis*; *C. pumila*; or European/Japanese hybrids, e.g. 'Bouche de Bétizac').
- **Examine trees at bud-burst.** Galls are spherical, green-rose colored and can occur on the midvein of the leaf, petiole, stipule, or on the growing twig. If the current season's green galls are clipped before adult emergence (~1<sup>st</sup> week of July in NY), infestation can be stopped before it begins!
- **Report new infestations on [iNaturalist](#)** or notify me, Chris Johnston, at [cvjohnst@syr.edu](mailto:cvjohnst@syr.edu) (pictures preferable).

### DO NOT:

- **Import living plant material** from known infested sites in NY or from another infested state (AL, CT, DE, GA, KY, MA, MD, MI, NC, NJ, NY, OH, PA, SC, TN, WV). Larvae can be transported through seedlings, saplings, and scion wood. As this species overwinters in the buds of chestnut species, bare-rooted seedlings may still be infested. If you must move living plant material from these locations, examine individuals at bud-burst for galls and clip them as early in the season as possible.
- **Clip previous season's brown galls.** *Torymus sinensis*, a parasitoid wasp deliberately introduced as a biological control agent to reduce ACGW populations, overwinters in these brown woody galls and thus by clipping them you are worsening the situation.



Current Season Galls (Green/Rose Colored & Pliable)



Previous Season Galls (Brown & Woody)

## District Director Reports

### Niko Nantsis, District 1

Hi everyone, I hope all is well with you. It has been busy here on Long Island. Aside from preparing to search for more American chestnut trees, I have been hard at work growing American chestnuts collected last fall with my Co-Director, Frank Piccininni, and Long Island Natives, a wholesale nursery dedicated to growing native plant species on Long Island. We have been busy potting American chestnuts that were overwintered and have their roots emerging.

I am looking forward to what this spring and summer have in store for us, and I am very excited to see the American chestnut trees grow so they can be used for Mother orchards. I am also looking forward to finding more American chestnut trees in local parks and woods around Long Island. They will be pollinated, cataloged, and compared to their former geographic distribution across Long Island.

### Dale Travis, District 2

District 2 has been busy arranging for Mother orchards. Two are planned by the New York City Parks Department on Governor's Island and Inwood Park in northern Manhattan. We will also continue with our indoctrination sessions for prospective new Park Rangers.

Wave Hill, a well-known public garden and sculpture center in the Bronx, which overlooks the Hudson River, is growing seedlings and will plant them this spring. A longtime member from New York City who planted a few seedlings a few years ago on his farm in Massachusetts wants to plant eight more as a Mother orchard. He also offered 30 acres of his land for chestnut production.

We are all eagerly awaiting the release of the Darling 58.

### Tim Termini, District 3

Here I am entering my very first spring as Director. It's hard to describe the level of excitement at this opportunity to drive positive and proactive change for such a historically significant region.

The American Chestnut is special.

Anyone reading *The Bur* already knows this, along with a lengthy list of reasons why, but perhaps I can share a differentiating aspect which dawned on me this past year. My realization comes on the heels of the world "suddenly" waking up to the fact that all those scientists were actually right about climate change. And that planet Earth, our one and only home, is at a critical juncture for sustaining life. I could delve into a litany of examples serving as evidence, but I'd prefer my inaugural Director's Report to remain positive. And there are positives. Many of them. One positive in particular accentuates why the American chestnut is even more special than previously thought.

It is an incredibly rare opportunity to have even a smidgen of control when saving a species from extinction. A quick search on your phone will provide various statistics about the current rates at which many species are approaching a dire end. The species at critical risk of extinction is accelerating. There is hope, however.

The American chestnut restoration program, in my mind's eye, can serve as a beacon of hope for teams elsewhere striving to save other species. Planting trees en masse is possibly the most efficient and logical solution for stabilizing Earth's climate, in my humble opinion. Planting chestnuts in particular? Well, if this purposeful mission can solve ecological issues while providing inspiration to others trying to help their favorite species elsewhere...

Priceless. The gift that keeps on giving.

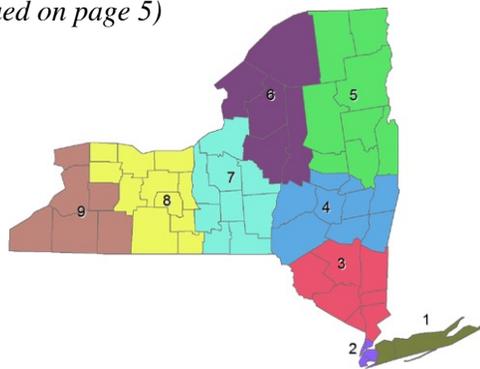
I appreciate this opportunity and look forward to making a positive impact together! Thank you and be well.

### Allen Nichols, District 4

The American chestnut restoration program is a two-step process, as described below.

First, we need people to plant wild type Mother trees in full sun, so they grow and flower quickly, sometimes in as little as three years, as flowering is controlled by sunlight. If you do this, you will have flowering trees to cross pollinate with the blight-tolerant transgenic tree, when it flowers. We are expecting government approval within two years to start the distribution of blight-tolerant seedlings and/or pollen. Then when you start to get blight-tolerant nuts, you can plant them in the forest where they will grow into timber trees. It may take 20+ years for the tree to reach the canopy and flower, depending on how much sunlight is available.

(Continued on page 5)



**District 1** – Niko Nantsis, [nikolaos.nantsis@gmail.com](mailto:nikolaos.nantsis@gmail.com) and Frank Piccininni, [Frank@savethegreatsouthbay.org](mailto:Frank@savethegreatsouthbay.org)

**District 2** – Dale L. Travis, [dale@daletravis.com](mailto:dale@daletravis.com)

**District 3** – Tim Termini, [termini@gmail.com](mailto:termini@gmail.com)

**District 4** – Allen Nichols, [fajknichols.75@gmail.com](mailto:fajknichols.75@gmail.com)

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## District Director Reports

(Continued from page 4)

Second, when planters or the New York chapter start producing blight-tolerant nuts, we would like people to plant some in NPOs (Nut Producing Orchards). These blight-tolerant trees should grow for hundreds of years, pollinating each other and producing the large number of nuts needed for restoration. If you have open acreage and are interested in planting an NPO once we have large quantities of blight-tolerant nuts, let me know.

I have hand pollinated my trees with blight-tolerant pollen for the past two years, under USDA permit. I hand pollinated over 1,000 burs last year. When we have government permission, we could start planting NPOs. This could be as early as next year, since we expect approval to distribute the blight-tolerant material by the fall of 2023.

### Emmett Hoops, District 5

The past few months have been fairly active in District 5. I gave presentations in the Clinton-Essex-Franklin library system and fielded many questions about when the blight-tolerant tree will be available. Over the past several years, many chestnuts and seedlings have been distributed to 4H and individuals who have emailed me. I'm in the process of contacting those people who've planted a Mother Orchard to see how their trees are holding up. In the next months, I will direct my library presentations south into Washington and Warren counties.

### Tim Russell, District 7

This past fall, some of us got together at the Sherburne Orchard to harvest wild-type American chestnuts with a group of First Nation people, Neil Patterson, and others from ESF's Center for Native Peoples and the Environment. Nuts taken from the plantation were used by the Haudenosaunee nation for traditional recipes.

Roy Hopke furthered the efforts at the plantation by planting several more American chestnut trees. This is an important part of maintaining the orchard because blight is rampant and is continually damaging established trees.

## Hand Pollination Program

ESF is mailing out wild-type American chestnut pollen to anyone interested in practicing hand pollinating Mother trees, to become familiar with the process for when the blight-tolerant pollen is available. There will be a small fee to help with processing. For more information, contact Hannah Pilkey at [hcpilkey@esf.edu](mailto:hcpilkey@esf.edu).



## 'DarWin' American Chestnut

(Continued from page 1)

### USDA APHIS Application Status:

Our chapter members may be wondering if the 'DarWin' line of trees will delay the application process now underway with the U.S. Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (USDA APHIS).

Anticipating this question, Dr. Powell writes: "It will not delay the Darling 58. The 'DarWin' trees would be submitted under a new USDA SECURE rule, after the Darling 58 approval. In this situation, the USDA will already be familiar with OxO expressing American chestnut trees, and therefore likely only go through step one of the review process. It is unlikely they would find a higher plant pest risk than Darling 58, since the 'DarWin' trees are producing less and more regulated OxO production. So, the time for completion is expected to be 180 days post Darling 58. This is a typical time for a field permit, but you never are 100% sure with the regulators."



Erik Carlson plants a transgenic Am. chestnut in a regulated plot.



American chestnut demonstration forest one year after planting.

### Not a waiting period:

During this time of federal regulatory review of the ESF application for non-regulated status for the Darling 58, developing the new 'DarWin' line of trees demonstrates it has not been "just a waiting period" for ESF. In addition to preparing and submitting thousands of pages of regulatory applications to the USDA, EPA, and FDA, ESF has been at work on several other fronts, including the world's first American chestnut demonstration forest. ESF has been keeping our members informed through reports in *The Bur*.

<sup>1</sup>Darling - The Darling 58 transgenic blight tolerant American chestnut is named after Herbert Darling, dedicated founder and first president of NY-TACF, who for more than three decades has championed transgenic trees as the best means of American chestnut restoration.

<sup>2</sup>Ellis - the late John Ellis was an ardent long-time NY-TACF Chapter Director who provided the chestnuts and genetic material from his forest land in Windsor NY, that the ESF team developed into the Darling 58.

# NY Chapter of The American Chestnut Foundation 31<sup>st</sup> Annual Meeting Achievement, Science, Enthusiasm, and Gratitude

by John Neumann, NY-TACF Secretary and Vice President for Education



New York State Chapter members of The American Chestnut Foundation attended the 2021 annual meeting via Zoom.

Our 31<sup>st</sup> Annual Meeting was held on October 16, 2021. For the second year in a row, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the Delta variant, the annual meeting was held online, via Zoom. Despite not being able to meet in person, meeting participants were enthusiastic about the work our chapter has done across the state and the science research accomplished by our partner, ESF American Chestnut Research and Restoration Project. Their work aligns with our mission: science-based restoration of the American chestnut.

**In Person Orchard Tour:** A tour of ESF’s orchard occurred in person on Saturday, September 25<sup>th</sup> at the Lafayette Road Experiment Station. Despite the pandemic, this tour was well attended. At the time of the tour, ESF required masks when gathering in groups. ESF staff guided the group through the orchard and answered questions.

**Harvest Exchange:** The Harvest Seed Exchange did not occur in person again this year. Wild-type American chestnuts collected from chapter orchards and members were sent to chapter president Allen Nichols. Allen put the nuts in cold storage and will mail them out this spring to members or others who request them for planting. Allen will also send detailed instructions along with the chestnuts.

**The Membership Meeting** opened at 11 a.m. with a welcome by Allen Nichols, Chapter President. Allen stated that our chapter was healthy, and we have grown to over 900 members. He also reviewed the agenda for the day.

This was followed by a series of reports from our District Directors. The reports indicated a variety of activities by our members, collectively and individually. Many hours of volunteer time accomplished what needed to be done to advance our goals. Allen thanked the district directors for coordinating these activities across the state.

At 11:30 a.m., ESF’s chestnut team gave a series of informative science reports. Much is being accomplished

to advance the research that underpins American chestnut restoration. This was followed by a question-and-answer period and a break beginning at 12:45 p.m.

**The Business Meeting** convened at 1:15 p.m., with the President’s Report given by Allen Nichols. Allen reviewed our chapter’s activities during the past year as well as our cooperation with chapters who support our transgenic research and restoration.

Next, the minutes of the 2020 Annual Meeting, which had been prepared by Secretary John Neumann, was approved as written. These minutes were available for advance review by our board members through an online link published in the fall 2021 issue of *The Bur*.

A review of the Annual Financial Report, prepared by Treasurer Fran Nichols, followed. This report was also available for advance review online, as above. Our checking account balance on August 1, 2020, was \$134,015.93. On August 31, 2021, our checking account balance was \$186,769.97 and our total financial assets were \$222,004.72. The report was approved as written.

The report of the Nominating Committee, composed of John Neumann (chair), Thomas Deacon, and Roy Hopke, followed. This report was also available for advance review online, as above. Nominees to serve as Chapter Directors for three years terms, from 2021 to 2024, were Paul Ackerman, James Donowick, Emmett Hoops, Roy Hopke, Linda McGuigan, Enrico Nardone, and T. Urling Walker. There were no nominations from the floor. All nominees were unanimously elected.

The business meeting drew to a close with encouraging remarks by President Allen Nichols.

Our thanks to Linda McGuigan (ESF Staff and NY-TACF Chapter Director) and Sara Fitzsimmons (TACF Director of Restoration) for the online Zoom arrangements.

# The American Chestnut Research and Restoration Project

## Adriana Del Grosso

*Tree Distribution Manager*



Since starting my position in January, I have been planning future educational plantings of our transgenic American chestnuts. We will partner with arboreta, botanical gardens, public parks, schools, historical sites, nature centers, and other organizations to establish small plantings of our trees in high visibility sites. The purpose is to educate the public about American chestnut, tree conservation, and biotechnology as a tool for restoration. Although these plantings cannot take place until we receive federal regulatory approval, this is a good time to establish connections with these organizations and begin conversations about how we can work together to form educational messages about our trees and use biotechnology as a tool for conservation.

These plantings are important for increasing our outreach and education efforts while we build up the production of our transgenic trees. Our outreach programming is funded by a Templeton World Charity Foundation grant. Initially, we will establish around 20 partnerships, mostly located in the northeastern range of the American chestnut, but we have plans to expand collaborations as our project grows. For more information about our educational partnerships program or our future distribution plans, contact me at [ardelgro@esf.edu](mailto:ardelgro@esf.edu).

## Leanne Hughes

*Graduate Student, Master's Degree*



I am pursuing a Master's degree in Environmental Biology with a concentration in Forest Pathology and Mycology. My research is rooted in exploring the potential for increased

drought and salt tolerance of transgenic American chestnut and transgenic American elm. Drought is a major issue that is expected to worsen with predicted climate change. Increased drought and salt tolerance may also confer resistance to plant pathogens. Presently, I am testing the drought tolerance capabilities of non-transgenic American chestnuts and American elm. I will later compare these data against their respective transgenic varieties. Mannitol, a type of carbohydrate, is used to simulate drought stress via a reduction in the growth medium's water potential.



Non-transgenic American elm shoots in mannitol laden growth medium. Shoot height was measured weekly to track growth. Changes to leaf color were also recorded.

Currently, I am designing transgenic American elm that contain a laccase gene. Experimentation will be conducted to determine if transgenic American elm with laccase perform differently in drought-like conditions than the non-transgenic American elm. Laccase expression has been shown to alter the xylem structure (vascular tissue) of some trees by thickening the secondary cell wall, increasing fiber cell length, and stem tensile strength. These factors contribute to increased water transport, ability to survive abiotic stress conditions, and a subsequent increase in drought tolerance.

## Kristen Stewart

*Retired Team Member*



A few years ago, Roy Hopke gave me chinquapin nuts. When I went away for a couple of weeks, they were not tended to properly and died. This was when I was in New York.

In the spring of 2019, I gave a presentation about the American Chestnut Research and Restoration Project to the Florida Native Plant Society. They graciously gave me three chinquapin trees as a gift, which I planted in my backyard in Florida. I hand pollinated them last year and one tree produced 30 nuts, eight were viable. I would like to get more nuts from Roy to plant alongside the three I currently have.

Also, a few years ago my partner and I planted American chestnut Mother trees on a 60-acre piece of property just south of Oneida. Last count (in March 2022), we still had 50 American chestnut trees growing on the site.



Chinquapin growing in my yard in Florida. Left – Nuts started in pots. Right – Current size of one of the trees growing in the yard.

For more information about the American Chestnut Research and Restoration Project, visit:

[www.esf.edu/chestnut](http://www.esf.edu/chestnut)

or join our Facebook group:

[www.facebook.com/groups/esfchestnut](https://www.facebook.com/groups/esfchestnut)



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**Join the New York State Chapter of The American Chestnut Foundation**

Visit [www.acf.org](http://www.acf.org), call 828-281-0047, or mail the form (below) to:

The American Chestnut Foundation Inc.  
 50 North Merrimon Avenue, Suite 115, Asheville, NC 28804

Enclosed please find my \$40 membership in support of NY-TACF.  
 I also make an additional gift of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ to the New York State Chapter.  
 A total of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ is enclosed.

All memberships to TACF include TACF publications, a car decal, membership to one of the state chapters as well as opportunities to participate in local chestnut activities. Visit [www.acf.org](http://www.acf.org) or call (828) 281-0047 for more information.

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NY Chapter membership includes the Newsletter *The Bur*. The NY Chapter helps guide research at ESF and maintains plantings to keep the American Chestnut gene pool. TACF & NY-TACF are 501 (c) (3) non-profit organizations. Except for the membership services portion of your contribution (valued at \$15) your gift is tax deductible to the full extent allowed by law.