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## **VT/NH Chapter (5-10) Year Strategy**

February 3, 2017

***The mission of The American Chestnut Foundation is to restore the American chestnut tree to our eastern woodlands to benefit our environment, our wildlife, and our society.***

On November 19, 2016, the Board of Directors (BOD) for the VT/NH Chapter of the American Chestnut Foundation (TACF) conducted a strategic planning workshop at the Marsh-Billings-Rockefeller National Historic Park in Woodstock, VT. Three non-Board member volunteers Forrest Hammond, Daane Crook, and Carol Wallace as well as TACF Regional Science Coordinator (RSC) Kendra Collins, also participated in the process. The workshop was organized by Chapter Secretary, Jim Talbot and facilitated by volunteer Curt Laffin and Jim Talbot.

A Chapter goal and five objectives had been established prior to the workshop so that participants could focus on strategy development. Participants were divided into two breakout groups. One produced strategies for Orchard Establishment and Management, the other for Membership and Volunteer Management.

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**Goal of the VT/ NH Chapter**  
***Self-sustaining stands of blight-resistant American chestnut trees growing in Vermont and New Hampshire woodlands***

**Breeding Orchard Management Objective**

**Objective 1) *Manage nine existing chestnut breeding orchards to produce BC3F2 chestnuts for seed orchards.***

Anticipated date: **Ongoing**

Note: *The actual number of nuts required, and the date when needed, will be determined by the number and timing of seed orchard creation.*

**Seed Orchard Site Selection Objective**

**Objective 2) *Identify chestnut seed orchards sites to use to produce sixth generation (B3F3) chestnuts.***

Anticipated date: **December 31, 2021**

**Seed Orchard Establishment and Management Objective**

**Objective 3) *Establish and manage between three and nine 1-acre seed orchards.***

Anticipated date: **2026**

**Membership Objective**

**Objective 4) *Sign up 20 additional VT/NH Chapter members annually.***

Anticipated date: **Ongoing**

**Volunteer Objective**

**Objective 5) *Build and maintain a team of volunteers with capability to manage VT/NH Chapter breeding and seed orchards and contribute to membership growth.***

Anticipated date: **Ongoing**

Following the break-out group sessions all participants reassembled to share results. Then, Chapter President Yuri Bihun, led a discussion that proposed adding the following objectives to the strategic plan. Strategies for these objectives will be developed as the plan evolves.

- **Expand the existing VT/NH American chestnut germplasm database.**

Definition: *(Germplasm is the living genetic resources such as seeds or tissue that is maintained for the purpose of animal and plant breeding, preservation, and other research uses.)*

- **Maintain an ongoing database of studies and field tests to guide the VT/NH Chapter toward effective options for establishing self-sustaining stands of B3F3 American chestnut trees in VT/NH woodlands.**
- **Build and maintain a team to raise funds.**

The BOD is responsible for approving and implementing this Strategic Plan. The sequence of implementation will be guided by priorities set by the BOD and through consideration of available resources and opportunities to facilitate actions. Continuous interaction with the Regional Science Coordinator (RSC) will be crucial to effective implementation.

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## Strategies for each Objective

### Objective 1) ***Manage nine existing chestnut breeding orchards to produce BC3F2 chestnuts for seed orchards.***

Anticipated date: **Ongoing**

Note: *The actual number of nuts required, and the date when needed, will be determined by the number and timing of seed orchard creation.*

### Breeding Orchard Strategies

- Appoint one or two Chapter Orchard Coordinators (if two, one from VT and one from NH), to work with the existing Orchard Managers to coordinate breeding and maintenance activities at each orchard. The Orchard Coordinator(s) will:
  - Work with the Orchard Managers to ensure all routine maintenance is performed and, address any issues or questions that may arise. Any issues or questions that cannot be handled by the Orchard Coordinator(s) will be brought to the Regional Science Coordinator (RSC).
  - Develop a sense of where each orchard is in the breeding program process. Identify appropriate next steps for data collection or action, such as height and mortality inventories, diameter inventories to determine whether the trees are large enough to inoculate, and working with the Orchard Manager and RSC to plan inoculation or rouging activities.
  - Work with Orchard Managers to use orchard-related activities as opportunities for outreach, volunteer engagement, and fund development.
  - Work with the RSC to develop a Chapter plan for managing and allocating harvested nuts.
  - Provide an interface among Orchard Managers and the BOD that will become a “sounding board” to facilitate BOD oversight and ensure efficient communication and orchard management.
  
- Each of the nine VT/NH breeding orchards has an Orchard Manager. The Chapter Orchard Coordinator(s), in collaboration with the RSC, will provide guidance for maintenance, data collection, and scheduling for each orchard.

Orchard Managers will:

  - Identify a volunteer base for his or her orchard and activate it as needed,
  - Work with that volunteer base to maintain the orchard and collect data as specified by the Orchard Coordinator(s).

- Work with the Orchard Coordinator(s) to develop plans for planting, rouging, and harvesting at the orchard.
- Work with the Orchard Coordinator(s) and volunteers to use orchard related activities as opportunities for outreach, volunteer engagement, and fund development.
- Obtain a USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) permit to cover orchard inoculations (or “field release”) with chestnut blight fungus (*Cryphonectria parasitica*) for one VT/NH Chapter representative in NH. The permit holder must reside in the state where the field release is occurring. The RSC currently holds a permit for VT, and intends to maintain that field release permit for as long as the regional office remains in VT.

**Objective 2) *Identify chestnut seed orchard sites to use to produce sixth generation (B3F3) chestnuts***

Anticipated date: **December 31, 2021**

**Seed Orchard Site Selection Strategies**

- Determine a desired number of 1-acre seed orchards blocks, between three and nine.
- Consolidate seed orchard site selection criteria and appoint the Chapter Orchard Coordinator(s) to review, or delegate review, of potential sites. Criteria will include:
  - A list of site characteristics that will ensure vigorous growth of American chestnut, and are beneficial to seed orchard management and maintenance activities.
  - Conduct a soil test of the site to verify appropriate pH and soil nutrition.
  - Explore the proposed site using Web Soil Survey, paying attention to soil moisture/drainage parameters, and ledge or depth to bedrock/restrictive layer.
  - Points to consider concerning long-term partnerships such as private vs. public land, and the types of agreements that could be made to ensure the longevity of the project.
  - When possible, install a test planting of pure American chestnut seeds the year prior to planting to better test site suitability and chosen management strategies.
- Answer the following management questions prior to making site selections:
  - Can the Seed Orchard Cooperator maintain long-term work requirements, or identify and engage local partners to assist in implementing them?

- Does the Seed Orchard Cooperator endorse the TACF mission?
  - Who will assess the orchard progress and adherence to its timeline?
  - What are TACF and Cooperator responsibilities for the orchard? These will be outlined in the orchard management plan.
  - What is the potential for raising sufficient funds to establish and manage the orchard?
- BOD will review criteria in relation to potential seed orchard sites and determine whether to accept or reject each one.
  - Seed orchard site selection will be used as an outreach tool to grow membership; recruit volunteers; and build partnerships with local, state, and federal agencies and natural resource oriented groups.
  - **Objective 3) *Establish and manage between three and nine 1-acre seed orchards.***  
Anticipated date: **2026**

### **Seed Orchard Establishment and Management Strategies**

- Appoint a BOD member as a liaison to assist landowners/cooperators and the BOD in the development of Seed Orchard Land Use Agreements (i.e. the Germplasm Agreement, as well as any MOU, License Agreement, Cooperative Agreement, etc. that addresses long-term use and partnership between the Chapter and Orchard Cooperator).
- BOD will “Push Down & Grow Wider” to build an integrated management team to interact with Seed Orchard Cooperators to establish and maintain each seed orchard, with guidance from the RSC. Local organizations and the VT/NH Chapter membership will be canvassed for potential team members.
- Seed orchard management will be used as an outreach tool to grow membership; recruit and activate volunteers; and build partnerships with local, state, and federal agencies and natural resource oriented groups.

**Objective 4) *Sign up 20 additional VT/NH Chapter members annually.***

Anticipated date: **Ongoing**

## **Membership Strategies**

### **General**

- Define BOD responsibilities relative to increasing membership.
- Create a VT/NH Chapter Membership Management Committee.

### **Outreach Tool Creation**

- Build and maintain a VT/NH Chapter website, in collaboration with TACF's website (expected launch date February 1, 2017).
  - Identify one or two Chapter members who can be trained on, and be responsible for, update and maintenance of this website.
- Develop a VT/NH Chapter overview handout for people who attend events. Include an answer to: "Where can I get a chestnut tree?"
- Work with the TACF national office to assess appropriate outreach related uses of the Chapter membership database.
- Build and maintain a database of contacts made during Chapter outreach events.
- Develop the VT/NH Chapter's capability to interact with social media applications.

### **Membership Buildings Activities**

- Keep in touch with members. (Adhere to TACF Chapter agreement regarding use of member contacts.)
- Publicize the schedule of Chapter events and volunteer opportunities.
- Give presentations that introduce audiences to the American chestnut story.
- Create two demonstration plantings annually in each State and generate local publicity. (Follow VT/NH Chapter Demonstration Planting Guidelines.)
- Participate in natural resource related forums such as the NH Farm & Forest Expo.
- Keep records of participants at events and talks and send them follow-up information.
- Write press releases and send to print news media such as newspapers and magazines.
- Give radio and TV interviews such as NHPR "The Exchange."
- Use social media for active marketing.

### **Other Potential Membership Strategies**

- Obtain membership-building guidance and support from the national TACF Office.

- Develop incentives for membership.
- Sell and/or give out American chestnut seeds.
- Offer unique membership incentives to students.
- Plan and conduct member surveys.
- Reach out to land owners.
- Reach out to school groups.
- Conduct “Open House” events at our orchards and other venues.
- Use Crowd Sourcing to obtain input from a number people via the internet.
- Analyze opportunities related to current interest in climate change.
- Plan and conduct membership building campaigns.
- Coordinate with TACF development staff to discuss the potential for:
  - Hiring a membership recruiter.
  - Buying names from other like-minded groups.

**Objective 5) *Build and maintain a team of volunteers with capability to manage VT/NH Chapter breeding and seed orchards and contribute to membership growth.***

Anticipated date: **Ongoing**

### **Volunteer Management Strategies**

- Define BOD responsibilities relative to volunteer recruitment and management.
- Create a VT/NH Chapter Volunteer Recruitment and Management Committee to assess multiple volunteer management actions and adopt those that can be implemented with available resources.

#### **Examples of Volunteer Management actions:**

- Build and maintain a VT/NH Volunteer database; begin with the list used by the RSC.
- Keep in touch with volunteers and follow up with thanks for service.
- Develop a volunteer “invitation” including guidelines, such as job descriptions.

#### **Examples of Volunteer Recruitment actions:**

- Survey members concerning willingness to volunteer.
- Use social media to recruit volunteers.
- Focus volunteer recruitment locally, i.e. near Chapter orchards.
- Ask people with specific skills and resources to volunteer.
- Look for volunteers within like-minded organization (land trusts, garden clubs, etc).



- Interact with businesses that offer employee volunteer opportunities.
- Interact with AmeriCorps to recruit job-specific volunteer teams.
- Work with universities having natural resource related programs to find volunteers.
- Work through “Volunteer NH” to advertise volunteer opportunities.

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## Summary of Post Workshop Discussion

### **General**

- Assess the relative contributions derived from VT/NH Chapter programs and activities such as: paid staff, membership fees, volunteers, grants, etc.
- Evaluate potential Chapter benefits that could be realized from the application of *Mail Chimp* and other technologies; apply those that could benefit the VT/NH Chapter.
- Gain a better understanding of services available at the national TACF office and take advantage of those that could benefit the VT/NH Chapter.

### **Germplasm Objective**

#### **Expand the existing VT/NH American chestnut germplasm database.**

Definition: (*Germplasm is the living genetic resources such as seeds or tissue that is maintained for the purpose of animal and plant breeding, preservation, and other research uses.*)

#### **Proposed Strategies**

- Build a system to document identification and location of germplasm which works in coordination with TACF's existing "Find a Tree" program.
- Store germplasm data in the TACF on-line database (dentataBase) and use it.
- Determine the feasibility of planting a VT/NH Chapter germplasm orchard.

### **Chestnut Reintroduction Objective**

#### **Maintain an ongoing database of studies and field tests to guide the VT/NH Chapter toward effective options for establishing self-sustaining stands of B3F3 American chestnut trees in VT/NH woodlands.**

#### **Proposed Strategies**

- Coordinate with ME and MA/RI Chapters and the TACF national office to stay abreast of ongoing reintroduction studies and trials. Apply results that could benefit reintroduction in VT and NH.

### **Fund Raising Objective**

#### **Build and maintain a team to raise funds.**

#### **Proposed Strategies**

- Write a VT/NH BOD fund raising guidance document.
- Focus on long-range seed orchard funding needs.

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