

Chestnut Mast

Spring 2000



THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE CAROLINAS CHAPTER OF THE AMERICAN CHESTNUT FOUNDATION

MAST: nuts (acorns) accumulated on the forest floor and often serving as food for animals (as hogs).--Merriam-Webster Dictionary

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR HUGH IRWIN

I feel honored to accept the Chair position with the Carolinas chapter of TACF. It has been almost a year since the seeds were sown to create the chapter. While we have accomplished much during this time, we still have a lot to do in order to successfully establish the chapter, to get dynamic programs in place, and to create the organizational structure to carry our programs forward.

One of the crucial elements that we do have in place is a newsletter, thanks to our talented and dedicated editors, Susan Wilson and Don Myers. Their work creating and maintaining the newsletter, recently christened "The Chestnut Mast", is a vital part of our communication and outreach.

We also have a very dynamic Mother Tree Project that has gotten a great start on establishing a program to incorporate genetic stock from the Carolinas into TACF's breeding program. Ron Myers accepted the lead in that project and has been helped by Paul Sisco, David and Kim Thompson, Bill O'Connor, and Bill Trimarco. Ron and Paul organized a very successful Mother Tree/NutCollection Workshop last September. The team has laid (continued on p.3)

NEW CHAIR FOR STEERING COMMITTEE ELECTED

Hugh Irwin, conservation planner with the Southern Appalachian Forest Coalition, was voted in as Chair of the Carolinas chapter's Steering Committee at their meeting on Thursday, February 17th. This was an important step for the chapter's advancement to full status. As a move toward being self-sustaining, it also allows the TACF Asheville office to concentrate on support functions, rather than maintaining a leadership role in the chapter. Hugh noted that the American chestnut was the biggest missing link in the ecology of Appalachia. His special interests include the Mother Tree Project and the genetic work. Congratulations, Hugh!

STEERING BY COMMITTEE

Since the last newsletter, the Steering Committee has met twice. Its first meeting was held on Thursday, February 17th 2000. In addition to the election of Steering Committee Chair and voting on a newsletter name, other important business included designating a small spending ceiling that could be used by the Asheville Office at their discretion without having to wait for Steering Committee approval. Much discussion also centered on (continued on p.2)

NEWSLETTER NAME AND LOGO CONTEST RESULTS

Logo 4 featured in the last newsletter proved to be the clear winner.



Jamie Erwine, a resident of New York, submitted this logo. A prize of a chestnut picture frame with historic chestnut photo has been sent to her. A runner-up prize of two TACF coffee mugs was sent to the designers of the round logo (Logo 2 in the harvest newsletter). The Steering Committee discussed the possibility of using this design as a badge or emblem for cap, jacket, shirt-sleeve, etc.



The Steering Committee discussed newsletter names in great detail. Two of

those proposed in the last newsletter were tied. It was the job of the Steering Committee to break the tie.

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is the official newsletter of
The Carolinas Chapter of
The American Chestnut
Foundation

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BECOME A CHARTER MEMBER

For a one-time donation of \$60 over the usual \$40 membership fee, you may become a CHARTER MEMBER of the Carolinas chapter. The additional money will help defray chapter startup & operating costs.

New Charter Members since our inaugural issue of 8/99

Robert and Elizabeth Brannon
W. Paul Dunn
John Eddleman
Elaine S. Friebele
Daniel Huger
Jack Mahaney
Robert Masto
Phil and Liz Pritchard
Sherman Runions
Charles H.Sloop
Mary Jean Tabaloff
Stephen A. Timmons

THE MISSION OF TACF IS SIMPLE: TO RESTORE THE AMERICAN CHESTNUT AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE EASTERN FOREST ECOSYSTEM THROUGH COOPERATIVE RESEARCH AND A SCIENTIFIC BREEDING PROGRAM.

(Newsletter Name continued from p.1)

Mast, one of the finalists in the title competition, was modified after discussion to become Chestnut Mast. For those unfamiliar with the meaning, even as were some who were present, "mast" is a term for food for wildlife. Hard mast refers to nuts; soft mast refers to berries, etc. The group decided that "mast" should be more specific, as the word has other connotations in this era. Hugh Irwin indicated that the chestnut tree has been gone so long that "mast" is no longer associated with it. When Phil Pritchard suggested to specify "chestnut" mast, the group unanimously agreed, as this seemed to combine both food and timber properties of the tree. **Mast** not only fed wildlife, but was also a cash crop for mountain families. The chestnut was dependable as a food source because it flowered later in the spring than other trees, thereby avoiding damage from late frosts. In a metaphorical sense, the newsletter hopes to offer food for thought; thus, the new name is apropos. Thanks again to Josh Abrams, who suggested the name in its original form, Mast, and to Phil for the modification!

LIKE OUR NEW LOOK?

Kim Thompson spied John Exley's beautiful picture of tree and animals in the winter 2000 Journal of the American Chestnut Foundation. Ana Ronderos at the national office got permission from the artist for Kim to incorporate the image in her design for the front page of our newsletter. Thanks to all involved.

MEMBERSHIP AND FINANCES

In North and South Carolina, there are about 275 members and 36 charter members. The chapter's treasury, started with donations from charter members (\$60 one-time fee), stands at approximately \$1400. This does not include the distribution due from the national office. Thus, the chapter has money in hand without the need for immediate fundraising, a remarkable situation for any chapter. (continued on p. 3)

(Steering continued from p.1)

graduating from provisional to full chapter status. One hundred new members are needed altogether. About 42 have been added. The chapter will benefit from a mass mailing this month to secure the new members needed for full status this October. Ideas for fundraisers abounded.

Regional coordinators plan to assess clear-cut areas for flowering and accessibility so they can plan efficiently for the spring "window of opportunity." A number of sites are being pursued for planting North Carolina American and improved seed. These include Biltmore Estate, Clarke family land, the NC Wildlife Resource Commission in regard to Lake Logan, and potentially, the new Dupont State Forest in Transylvania County. Interviews with those who remember the demise of the American chestnut continue for the oral history project.

The next meeting of the Steering Committee was on March 30, 2000. Agenda items included incorporating our chapter, setting the agenda and timetable for a chapter event on May 6th at the Pisgah Inn, and activating committees. Also discussed was arranging for pollination crews at Meadowview and the Carolinas chapter's role in preparing for the TACF National Meeting, 19-22 October at Abingdon, Virginia, near Meadowview.

MEADOWVIEW NOTES

Paul Sisco, Staff Geneticist and Carolinas chapter Charter Member says, "We've been planting at Meadowview and have just about completed all the orchards." He adds that American Electric Power put a line in the week of March 26th to power the electric irrigation pump at the new Price Farm.

"Those days are now forever past
And gone the Chestnut tree,
That tree that bore the choicest mast
Greed and blight has claimed the last
Victims of the axe and blast,
And mourned by you and me."

From the Poem "Dirge to the Chestnut Tree" by William L. Rathburn, courtesy of the Asheville-Citizen Times archives.

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essential groundwork to take advantage of Spring flowering and Fall nut harvest windows. They have done critical background work during the winter to successfully kick off efforts in the Spring to utilize flowering trees. These efforts include locating a number of trees that are expected to flower. Efforts are also underway to locate suitable land so that we can have local plantings. Mark Rogers has played a key role in these and other efforts.

We have a dynamite chapter logo, thanks to Jamie Erwine. And, thanks to Kim Thompson's graphic skills and contacts, we also have designs for our newsletter, mugs, t-shirts, and other materials that will help us promote and raise the profile of the chapter.

When you look at all that the chapter has accomplished in its brief history, it is cause for optimism and celebration. However, there is much that we still need to accomplish. We still must graduate from a "Provisional" chapter to a fully recognized chapter. To do this we need to add members to our ranks and successfully carry through a number of projects. As a close neighbor to the Meadowview Research Farm, we should play an increasing role in their tree breeding program. Pollination and nut gathering activities could be a great way for many of our members to learn about and take part in the actual development of blight-resistant trees.

We also need to build our infrastructure by becoming a 501(c)3 organization. This is a rather long process that needs to be started. Robert Eidus has already provided valuable practical advice for this process, and Jackie Greenfield has offered important perspective from her involvement with other 501(c)3 organizations. Phil Prichard has taken a role in getting us legal assistance for the process. There is also tremendous opportunity for education and outreach. Leah Florence and Forrest MacGregor continue to get the American chestnut and TACF profiled in the news media, and we were featured in the April 3 edition of "Enterprise Mountaineer" thanks to Mark Rogers.

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THE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Large thanks to Barbara Sayer and WCQS-FM. Barbara arranged the loan of a professional quality cassette recorder to us at the end of February so that Emily Lower could conduct interviews with five local folk, to elicit their "chestnut memories." She managed to tape Junius Allison (Black Mountain), Herstel Moss (Glenville), Louise Nelson (Waynesville), Wilburn Passmore (Webster/Syva), and Kate Rhinehart (Webster). The Carolinas chapter would like to thank these folk for their time and their permission to use material from their interviews to further our projects. Thanks also to Dick Cole at WCQS-FM for helpful technical information. We hope to conduct more interviews in the future--Emily took a break from the project to do a short consultancy with the Mountain Heritage Center at WCU.

MOTHER TREE (MT) PROJECT SPRING 2000 By Ron Myers

Spring brings newfound excitement for rekindled life, exciting discoveries, and the sweet pungent scent of chestnut flowers. There are two very important times or seasons when chestnut workers and volunteers are busy. One is during spring when the flowers (catkins) are blooming and pollen is flying. The second is during fall or harvest when we enjoy the fruits (nuts) of our labor.

Finding flowering chestnut trees in NC that we can properly gather to use for a local source in breeding work will be a challenge. Upcoming efforts by MT volunteers will focus on finding flowering American chestnuts in clear cuts that are located in groups, contain at least 5-10 sprout clumps, are between 5-7 years old, and have easy access for future work. If local NC sprouts are pollinated with other pollen from known families, then the nuts that may develop if successful will be 50% from a NC source. We are trying to increase more NC genetic material for future breeding work. We hope to find at least 1 of these MT working areas in 3 of the designated collection regions. Suitable MT areas will be scouted this spring and summer of 2000.

Other goals include recruitment of more volunteers to do this type of work and education of those who help on the reproductive biology of American chestnut in NC. Understanding how and when certain tree species flower is (continued on p. 4)

CHESTNUT TRIVIA

There is a wonderful book called *Earth Medicine Earth Food* by Michael A. Weiner. It is characterized as "The classic guide to the herbal remedies and wild plants of the North American Indians." Full of interesting botanical illustrations, it also lists various remedies for common and not-so-common ailments. For instance, under coughs, Weiner notes, "The Mohegans made what they considered to be 'an excellent cough remedy' from mullein leaves steeped in molasses. The same tribe also steeped spikenard leaves in warm water or used the leaves of American chestnut in the same way to calm the respiratory nerves and to promote expectoration."

The section titled *Earth Food* begins with an intriguing thought, "In all cultures close to the earth, food is medicine." Under chestnut, we find these tidbits:

"The Iroquois gathered fresh chestnuts, removed the outer shells, and then crushed the kernels in wooden bowls. The crushed nuts were then boiled in water and the oil skimmed off the surface. This delicious oil was served separately with corn bread and used as a topping for various puddings. The remaining boiled nutmeat was used to make puddings, or when dried, was pounded into flour and added to bread ingredients to produce a better flavor. The chestnut kernel is approximately 7 percent fat and 11 percent protein and contains phosphorus, potassium, magnesium, and sulphur.

A close relative of the American chestnut, the chinquapin, produces a smaller, sweeter nut, which was eaten by Indian groups throughout its range of growth from Texas to Pennsylvania. The American chestnut originally extended throughout New England, north to Ontario, but was destroyed by a chestnut blight. The great forests of American chestnuts have been replaced by new plantings of Asian varieties. The common chestnuts sold by street vendors in many American cities are mainly imported from Spain and Italy." Weiner earned his Ph.D in nutritional ethnomedicine from the University of California, Berkeley.

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Bill O'Connor has taken on the project of developing a welcome packet for new members. We have a handful of people taking our display to events and giving talks and presentations, but there is so much more potential to get our message out if additional people become involved in these outreach activities.

The Asheville TACF office is a tremendous asset to the chapter. Leah and Forrest, while focused on national TACF business, also have a great interest and dedication in seeing that the chapter succeeds. They both have played a key role in getting resources and support to the chapter during this crucial first year. The very existence of the Asheville office is evidence that many people think that our area is a key part of the Chestnut's range and where the tree reached its most spectacular development. We should use the resources of the TACF office in the best possible way: to develop and mature our chapter so that it can gradually take on more tasks and responsibilities of its own.

We are in an exciting time and in a critical area. A blight-resistant American chestnut is only 7 - 10 years away. Our area of the Carolinas and the Southern Appalachians is arguably one of the most important parts of the American chestnut's range. We can have the elements in place to successfully reintroduce American chestnut when it is time. This program will need to take advantage of the tremendous genetic reserve of American chestnut still remaining in our forests. It will also depend on the tremendous potential of people who love this tree and want to see it back as a dominant tree in our forests. We need everyone's talents and involvement to make this dream a reality.

Be sure to join us at the May 6 event at the Pisgah Inn. This will be an excellent time to celebrate our first year, to learn about the chapter's activities, and to connect with other people interested in American chestnuts.



(MT Project continued from p. 3)

key to any hardwood tree improvement or restoration project.

To learn more about the MT project contact Ron Myers at ron.myers@ncmail.net or call 919-553-6178.

**UPDATE ON THE
SOUTHWESTERN REGION
Cherokee, Clay, Graham,
Haywood, Jackson, Macon, Swain
and Transylvania Counties
By David Thompson**

We have been very busy in the Southwestern Region. With the help of several volunteers we have been able to locate and tag quite a few trees that bore nuts last year. We also were able to collect some nuts from the Fall 1999 crop. Our current efforts are directed towards locating and tagging any trees that appear to be viable possibilities for either producing nuts or pollen. Several large trees were found in the Cashiers area, one with a diameter of 10 inches, DBH. Our most fruitful find was a group of trees in an old clear-cut that is being maintained as a wildlife opening. Here we found about four Chestnuts all of which were producing large amounts of nuts.

At a recent meeting it was decided to put the majority of our efforts into locating trees in old clear cuts, with the goal of pollinating these trees directly in the field. We would use pollen from the backcrossed trees at the Farm in Virginia. Open areas such as old clear cuts would be utilized since chestnuts will grow rapidly without competition from other trees. Such trees will usually grow vigorously enough to produce at least one or two crops of nuts before giving into the blight. The nuts can then be harvested in the fall and, after a period of stratification, grown out. Such pollinated trees will contain 50% North Carolina genetic material. Efforts are being pursued to locate a suitable area in North Carolina for establishing an out planting where these trees can then be grown. Volunteers are always welcome for both locating trees, and in the spring, in pollinating the trees.

Contact David Thompson at namaste@primeline.com

EVENTS FUTURE/SEE YOU THERE!

Mark the following dates on your calendar:

Earth Day event, **April 22nd 2000**. Visit our display table at City/County Plaza. We'll be there from noon 'til six.

Carolinas chapter Spring Fling at Pisgah Inn on **May 6th 2000**. The Pisgah Inn and its campgrounds will be open starting April 1st. People interested in staying over if they come to the all-day event should contact the Inn. Their website is www.pisgahinn.com This meeting will celebrate the one year anniversary of the founding of the Carolinas chapter.

Forrest MacGregor, TACF Vice President, Development, will speak at the Upper Hickory Nut Gorge Community Organization in Gerton, NC, on **May 16th 2000**, at their invitation.

It's not too early to pencil in the TACF Annual Meeting, **October, 20th-22nd 2000** held this year in Abingdon, Virginia, near the TACF research farms. Since it is only about an hour and a half north of Asheville, it will be a most accessible conference. It will be at the Southwest Virginia Higher Education Center in Abingdon. Stay tuned for more information as it becomes available.

EVENTS PAST/DID YOU SEE US?

Several chapter members volunteered, along with Leah Florence, Asheville office, to answer questions and share our display at the 7th Annual Organic Growers School at Blue Ridge Community College Flat Rock, NC, on March 18th. Approximately 400 people attended the one-day event. Many people stopped by the well-placed display to register on our mailing list. Leah Florence, Paul Sisco, Bill O'Connor, and David Thompson arranged and tended the display. David folded the display at the end of the day and Kim kindly returned it to the office.

Dr. Paul Sisco spoke to the Elisha Mitchell chapter of the Audubon Society at the Botanical Gardens in Asheville, NC, on March 21st on "Restoring the American chestnut." (continued on p. 5)

GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING MAY 6TH AT THE PISGAH INN

Plan for an exhilarating day in the mountains on the Blue Ridge Parkway, the site of our first meeting of 2000. The agenda of the day has been set as follows, but times are approximate so as to accommodate local changes.

- 11:00 -11:30 am--Gather for socializing and coffee
- 11:30 am - 12:30 pm--Hike the Shut In Trail to view budding chestnuts (Inclement weather alternative: Slide show and other presentations by chapter members)
- 1:00 - 2:30 pm--Lunch and business

PLEASE SEE PAGE 5 OF THIS NEWSLETTER FOR SCHEDULE OF FEES & REQUIRED PREREGISTRATION FORM.

- 2:30 - 3:30 pm--Pollination Workshop

The workshop, which is at no charge, is open to those wishing to join us then.

The Pisgah Inn has an informative website complete with pictures of the Inn, the Meeting Room and other accommodations, including camping, at www.pisgahinn.com. The website will also provide you with current Parkway weather conditions (or call [828] 235-8228). At an elevation of 5,000 feet it can be windy and brisk; remember to dress warmly; bring a raincoat. NB: campsites cannot be reserved--first come, first served. In the event of inclement weather, special presentations will replace the hike scheduled for 11:30.

"SIGHTINGS"

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC, January, 2000, featured a half-page mention of TACF with picture of The American chestnut in their "Behind the Scenes" section.

ASHEVILLE CITIZEN-TIMES, on Thursday, March 9th 2000, ran an article on the front page of their Mountains section, continued inside, "Chestnut replanting effort is launched."

THE RAVEN'S NEST, newsletter of the Elisha Mitchell Audubon Society, has mentioned the Carolinas chapter TACF in each of their three newsletters of 2000. Dayna Feist, newsletter editor, gave information on our Mother Tree Project, our oral history project, and the presentation by Dr. Paul Sisco, March 21, 2000, on "Restoring the American chestnut to Eastern Forests."

MOUNTAIN XPRESS featured an interesting and upbeat article with two superb photos in their March 15-21 issue, "From the Bottom up, Resurrecting the American chestnut" by Melanie McGee. The article also mentioned Dr. Sisco's free lecture at the Botanical Gardens on March 21st in a capsule at the end of the article.

www.acf.org Have you cased out the new website? You can visit all the chapters, including ours, with just a click on a map or on the word "chapters."

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