

DNR and American Chestnut Foundation Sign Agreement

ANNAPOLIS—On Friday, May 26, representatives of the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and The American Chestnut Foundation (TACF) planted an American chestnut seedling in a ceremony at Green Ridge State Forest in Allegany County. The American chestnut was once a dominant tree in the Appalachian forests, but was virtually wiped out by a blight fungus in the early part of the last century.

DNR's Western Regional Forester Robert Webster and Marshal T. Case, President and CEO of The American Chestnut Foundation, gathered with representatives of both groups to celebrate the signing of an historic agreement between the two organizations that will promote cooperation in research and eventual restoration of the species in Maryland.

Although TACF cooperates under a similar agreement with the U.S. Forest Service, this is its first agreement at the state level. Although located in the heart of the natural range of the American chestnut, Maryland has no national forest land. This agreement with DNR opens possibilities for the research and development of blight-resistant American chestnut trees on some of the thousands of acres of Maryland State Forest land.

The American Chestnut Foundation has worked for nearly 25 years to restore the American chestnut through a program known as backcross breeding. The 300 members of the state chapter of TACF, established in 2003, support a backcross breeding program to develop blight-resistant chestnuts regionally adapted to conditions in Maryland forests. Chapter volunteers have established several breeding orchards in Maryland, including a newly established orchard on the Monocacy Natural Resource Management Area in Frederick County.

This year marks the 100th anniversary of Maryland's Forest Service. The first State Forester, Fred W. Besley, was witness to the loss of the American chestnut to the chestnut blight (*Cryphonectria parasitica*), which was first identified in the United States in 1902. At that time, the tree dominated the Appalachian mountaintops from Maine to Georgia. A fast growing species with straight-grained, rot-resistant wood, the American chestnut grew trunks as much as 19 feet in diameter. Both wood and nuts were economically important. In less than 30 years, these forest giants had virtually disappeared, leaving acres of stands of dead wood. The historic agreement between DNR and TACF opens new possibilities for the return the American chestnut in Maryland forests during the next century.

For more information:

Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Forest Service:
<http://dnr.maryland.gov/forests>

The American Chestnut Foundation:
<http://www.acf.org>

Maryland Chapter of The American Chestnut Foundation:
<http://www.mdtaf.com>

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