



THE
AMERICAN
CHESTNUT
FOUNDATION

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For Immediate Release
October 21, 2008

The American Chestnut Foundation and the Department of Interior's Office of Surface Mining to sign historic partnership agreement

Chattanooga, TN – The US Department of Interior's Office of Surface Mining (OSM) and The American Chestnut Foundation (TACF) are entering into a historic partnership to use former coal surface mined lands as sites for new American chestnut plantings under a five-year agreement. The two organizations are signing the agreement at TACF's annual meeting at the Sheraton Read House on Saturday, October 25 at 10:00 a.m. in the Silver Ballroom.

An active partnership between the Office of Surface Mining and the Foundation has the potential for propelling forward a reforestation renaissance on surface mines as no other effort can. The American chestnut inspires landowners, coal operators, scientists, regulators, members of conservation and environmental groups, and school children to get excited about and involved in the reforestation of mined land with the idea of contributing to a major ecological restoration effort. Since citizen participation and involvement are hallmarks of the federal Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act (SMCRA), the inspiration provided by the American chestnut for mine reforestation would be greatly welcomed by the Office of Surface Mining.

Brent Wahlquist, Director of the Office of Surface Mining said, "The native range of the American chestnut and the Appalachian coal fields are in near perfect alignment so surface mines can serve as very effective vectors of dispersal where the plantings of this majestic tree species are part of the reclamation work. Furthermore, surface mines have been shown to produce superior tree growth and rapid reestablishment of forests because mine operators have

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learned how to control competition to tree seedlings from herbaceous vegetation and create loose rooting mediums.”

Wahlquist continued, “The idea for a formal partnership between the TACF and OSM materialized in the spring of this year when 11,809 American chestnuts were planted on reclaimed mine sites by operators, TACF and university scientists, and hundreds of school-children during Arbor Day events hosted by the coal industry. The enthusiasm generated by the planting of those chestnuts was phenomenal. The American chestnut is like a “magic bean” for surface mine reforestation and OSM anticipates that our partnership with the Foundation will play a key role in the reestablishment of healthy and productive forests on mine sites across Appalachia.”

For each American chestnut seed that is planted on a surface mine, up to 600 other native, high-value, hardwood trees, such as red oak, sugar maple, yellow-poplar, black walnut, and white oak, may also be planted in the planting mix. Because the American chestnut is a cultural icon, its inclusion contributes mightily to the efforts of the Office of Surface Mining to increase reclamation with other high-value hardwood trees, to significantly improve the survival and growth rate of those trees, and to enhance forest habitat through natural succession with the FRA. Its inclusion also results in an enhancement of ancillary environmental benefits of properly reclaimed forests, such as increased carbon sequestration, wildlife habitat, and reduced runoff, erosion, sedimentation, and downstream flooding.

TACF President and CEO Marshal Case said, “As the American chestnut returns to its native forests, especially here in Tennessee, and as forest health improves, species that were dramatically decreased when the chestnut was destroyed will once again rebound. This will be a huge benefit to wildlife populations as these newly planted trees will provide on-the-ground habitat protection. By partnering with OSM we’re helping change the way laws regulate and operate coal mined land uses by changing the scientific approach.”

Case also said that the return of the chestnut will help improve air and water quality, carbon sequestration levels and provide a boost to an economy that was decimated by the loss of the American chestnut in the early part of the 20th century. Lands that merely adjoined those where the chestnut dominated were impacted by the “ripple effect” of the chestnut blight. “Our partnership with OSM comes down to three simple things: people, wildlife and science,” said Case. “The American chestnut is truly a tree of hope for each of these.”

The American Chestnut Foundation is a nonprofit 501-c-3 organization with more than 6000 members nationwide and chapters in 17 states. It is headquartered in Bennington, VT and has research facilities in Meadowview, VA and a regional office in Asheville, NC. To learn more about TACF, please visit www.acf.org.

The Office of Surface Mining is responsible for carrying out the requirements of SMCRA in cooperation with states and tribes. One of the primary objectives of the agency is to ensure that coal mines are restored to beneficial post mining land uses, such as healthy, productive forestland. The Office of Surface Mining is actively promoting reforestation where existing forests were removed by mining and, when practical, is encouraging forest establishment after reclamation wherever coal is mined. The Office of Surface Mining encourages regional initiatives that facilitate partnerships with states, conservation groups, major universities,

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industry, public interest groups, and other Federal agencies in a concerted effort to promote reforestation of coal mined lands. For more information, please visit <http://arri.osmre.gov/>.

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