

# Green Forests Work - The CCC Plan of the 21st Century

## Millions of Trees Planted on Reclaimed Mine Lands

*from Middlesboro Daily News, Saturday, November 12, 2011. Brandy Calvert, Editor.*



Pictured is Green Forests Work (GFW) creator Dr. Chris Barton, addressing volunteers about the mission of GFW and the UN to plant one tree for every person on the planet, prior to a tree planting on a mine site in the Fishtrap Watershed area.

The Lorax would be proud.

Volunteers gathered on Saturday on reclaimed mine lands just outside of Pikeville, Ky., planting hundreds of trees that will restore non-productive grasslands in the Fishtrap Watershed area.

This planting is one of numerous such events, all part of an enormous effort initiated by the United Nations (UN) in fall 2009. Two years ago, the UN's Billion Tree Campaign set a goal of planting one tree for every person on the planet. The Appalachian Regional Reforestation Initiative (ARRI) pledged to plant 38 million trees on mined land, the largest pledge in North America.

For Appalachia, this pledge will result in many benefits, including possible job creation and reforestation of mine lands.

Volunteers from local colleges, faith based groups and The Sierra Club came together on the strip mine for the event. Representatives from the American Chestnut Foundation, Green Forests Work (GFW), Appalachian Regional Reforestation Initiative (ARRI), the Office of Surface Mining, Berea College and the Southeastern District of the Kentucky Division of Forestry (including Bell County) were present for the monumental event.

The plantings, which included a predominance of black walnut along with other native hardwoods, are part of a broad effort on the part of the multiple agencies to reforest damaged mine lands.

Since the 1970s, many reclaimed mine sites were first heavily compacted with bulldozers and then planted with non-native grasses. This created a limited grassland ecosystem devoid of the original forest where very little changed over the years. Working with many partners, ARRI has developed methodologies that involve breaking up the surface of these areas and planting native hardwoods that thrive and start an ecological succession to a fully established healthy, productive forest.

Once nearly obliterated, two American Chestnut trees (new and potentially blight-resistant) were planted on Saturday. "One of the trees that ARRI favors is the American chestnut, " says Patrick Angel, Senior Forester with the Office of Surface Mining, US Department of the Interior. "They adapt well to the reclaimed mine land growing environment, and they were once an important part of the local forests. They also provide erosion and sediment control, essential wildlife habitat, vital biodiversity, and an economic return that can once again be important to Appalachian communities."

Once the mighty giant of our eastern forests, American chestnuts stood up to 100-feet tall, and numbered in the billions. In 1904 a blight, accidentally imported from Asia, spread rapidly through the American chestnut population. By 1950 the blight fungus had killed virtually all the mature trees from Maine to Georgia. Several attempts to breed blight resistant trees in the mid-1900s were unsuccessful.

Then in 1983, a dedicated group of scientists formed The American Chestnut Foundation (TACF®) and began a special breeding process, which in 2005 produced the first potentially blight-resistant trees called Restoration Chestnuts. Now assisted by nearly 6,000 members and volunteers in 23 states, the organization is undertaking the planting of Restoration Chestnuts in select locations, which include reclaimed mined land, throughout the eastern US as part of the Foundation's early restoration and testing efforts.

The two American Chestnut trees that were planted on Saturday were dedicated to Nobel Laureate Wangari Maathai, a patron of the UN's Billion Tree Campaign and founder of the Green Belt Movement.

"The ARRI plantings and the re-establishment of the American Chestnut represent a breakthrough in the conservation of our diverse forest ecosystems and our heritage. As a young child I would listen to my grandfather tell stories of when the American Chestnut tree still dominated the forests of Appalachia. He would also tell stories of how he worked with the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) when times were hard and jobs were scarce. We hope that programs such as Green Forest Works will be able create more jobs that are centered around the conservation of our natural resources much like the CCC did in the 1930's," said Jared Calvert, a district forester with the Kentucky Division of Forestry.

Green Forests Work is styled after the CCC program of the 1930s, Dr. Chris Barton, GFW creator said. It's actually an economic development plan for Appalachia. Their current focus is the million acres of previously forested land that was mined for coal and reclaimed as grassland.

"These lands provide the opportunities for jobs (current and future), improvement of environmental conditions (air and water) and other 'green' endeavors," Dr. Barton said.

Barton and GFW believe that the endeavor can bring jobs to the coalfields and reforest old strip mine sites. They believe that through reforestation of these areas, they can restore the landscape's capacity to produce forest products for future use in manufacturing and energy production; restore "environmental infrastructure"; and build a human-resource capacity and infrastructure through private and non-profit sectors that will generate jobs and economic activity — years after the trees are planted.

In addition to a performance by several talented bluegrass musicians last Saturday, a blessing by a representative of Native American nations was performed.

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