



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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West Virginia Chapter of The American Chestnut Foundation and MeadWestvaco Committed to Species Restoration as part of SFI Conservation Grant Project

RUPERT, WV – The West Virginia Chapter of The American Chestnut Foundation planted more than 650 of its most promising blight-resistant American chestnut trees Saturday, April 30th, on MeadWestvaco lands near Rupert, as part of a species restoration project funded through a Sustainable Forestry Initiative[®] (SFI[®]) conservation grant.

The American chestnut tree once produced high-value wood products, such as furniture and rail ties, and was a valuable food source for a wide variety of wildlife from bears to birds. An estimated four billion trees were lost to an exotic, Asian, fungal disease (chestnut blight) during the first half of the 20th century. “The trees planted Saturday are the result of more than 30 years of scientific research for blight resistance and American chestnut growth characteristics,” said Jimmy Jenkins, President of the West Virginia Chapter of The American Chestnut Foundation. “Partnerships with organizations like SFI and MWV are invaluable in our efforts to restore this important species.”

“The return of the American chestnut to its former range in the Appalachian hardwood forest ecosystem is a major restoration project,” said Bryan Burhans, President and CEO of The American Chestnut Foundation. “Only through the continued effort of our 6,000 members and volunteers, partners, and research, can we eventually realize our goal of the American chestnut once again being an essential component of our forests.”

Volunteers from the West Virginia Chapter of The American Chestnut Foundation planted the trees alongside partners from MWV, SFI, Glenville State College forestry students, West Virginia Division of Forestry, Meadow River Watershed Association, and the West Virginia SFI State Implementation Committee. The project, with funding through the SFI Conservation and Community Partnerships Grant Program, will eventually result in the planting of about 3,000 American chestnut trees in the southeastern United States, as well as the collection and utilization of baseline information which will facilitate the process of species restoration.

“As a company committed to effective and sustainable management of forestlands, MWV welcomes the opportunity to be part of this tremendous effort to restore the American chestnut,” said Gene Hundley, President, MWV Forestry.

“Restoring this magnificent tree to its historic range is one way we can demonstrate the value of bringing together informed partners to advance important research,” said SFI President and CEO Kathy Abusow. “This project addresses so many SFI Standard requirements – including research, conservation of biodiversity, managing wildlife habitat, and protecting threatened and endangered species.”



Note to editors: Background information about the American chestnut tree is attached. For photos of the tree planting event, contact Meghan Jordan (828) 713-9547.

About The American Chestnut Foundation

The American Chestnut Foundation (TACF) is a non-profit organization founded in 1983 by a group of prominent plant scientists who recognized the severe impact the demise of the American chestnut tree had on the economy of rural communities and the ecology of forests in woodlands of the eastern United States. Its mission is to restore the American chestnut tree in its native range, using a scientific research and breeding program developed by its founders. The American Chestnut Foundation harvested its first potentially blight-resistant nuts in 2005, and has begun reforestation trials with potentially blight-resistant American-type trees.

About the Sustainable Forestry Initiative Inc.

SFI Inc. is an independent 501(c)(3) non-profit charitable organization, and is solely responsible for maintaining, overseeing and improving the internationally recognized Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) program (www.sfiprogram.org). Across North America, more than 180 million acres are certified to the SFI forest management standard, making it the largest single forest standard in the world. SFI chain-of-custody certification tells buyers the percentage of fiber from certified forests, certified sourcing and/or post-consumer recycled content. The SFI program's unique fiber sourcing requirements promote responsible forest management on all suppliers' lands. SFI Inc. is governed by a three-chamber board of directors representing environmental, social and economic sectors equally.

About MeadWestvaco

MeadWestvaco Corporation (NYSE: MWV), provides packaging solutions to many of the world's most admired brands in the healthcare, beauty and personal care, food, beverage, home and garden, tobacco, and commercial print industries. The company's businesses also include Consumer & Office Products, Specialty Chemicals, and the Community Development and Land Management Group, which sustainably manages the company's land holdings to support its operations, and to provide for conservation, recreation and development opportunities. With 17,500 employees worldwide, MWV operates in 30 countries and serves customers in more than 100 nations. MWV manages all of its forestlands in accordance with internationally recognized forest certification standards, and has been named to the Dow Jones Sustainability World Index for seven consecutive years. For more information, please visit www.mwv.com.

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Backgrounder: The American Chestnut Tree

The American chestnut tree was once an essential component of the entire eastern United States ecosystem. An estimated four billion American chestnuts were lost to chestnut blight and nearly 200 million from Maine to Florida and west to the Ohio Valley, making up one quarter of the hardwood tree population within this range.

A late-flowering, reliable, and productive tree, unaffected by seasonal frosts, it was the single most valuable food source for a wide variety of wildlife from bears to birds. Rural communities depended upon the annual nut harvest as a cash crop to feed livestock. The chestnut lumber industry was a major sector of rural economies. Chestnut wood is straight-grained and easily worked, lightweight and highly rot-resistant, making it ideal for fence posts, railroad ties, barn beams and home construction, as well as for fine furniture and musical instruments.

By 1950, the most American chestnut trees succumbed to a lethal fungus infestation, known as the chestnut blight. The blight, imported to the United States on Asian chestnut trees, is a fungus dispersed via spores in the air, raindrops or animals. It enters through a fresh injury in the tree's bark, spreads into the bark and underlying vascular cambium and wood, and kills these tissues as it advances. The flow of nutrients is eventually choked off to and from sections of the tree above the infection, killing them.

The return of the American chestnut to its former range in the Appalachian hardwood forest ecosystem is a major restoration project that requires a multi-faceted effort involving 6,000 members and volunteers, research, sustained funding and most important, a sense of the past and a hope for the future.