

Since April 2002, Heritage Conservancy, The American Chestnut Foundation and representatives from several Bucks County Boy Scout troops have been planting and maintaining a nursery in an attempt to bring back the American chestnut tree. The Fuller Preserve, a 64-acre conservancy-owned property in the Cooks Creek Watershed, was chosen as the site where this important effort would be undertaken.

In the first year of planting, more than thirty people including twenty Boy Scouts from Troop 52, six scoutmasters, and representatives from the American Chestnut Foundation, the Cooks Creek Watershed, and Heritage Conservancy participated in this effort to begin propagating a disease resistant American chestnut tree. The scouts assisted with laying out the planting plan, planting the seeds, and finally protecting the trees with special tubes provided by the Department of Conservation and Natural Resource's Bureau of Forestry. The Scouts also assisted with managing those invasive plant species that were taking over the field in which the planting took place. The Scouts learned how to create wildlife habitat by piling up the material that was cut and making brush piles that will be used by a host of local animals.

After planting thirty-six pure American chestnut seeds and fourteen F1 Hybrids, that are partially blight resistant, the scouts were given a short history of the American chestnut tree's importance in American forests by Tom Pugel of the PA chapter of the American Chestnut Foundation and Carl Martin of Heritage Conservancy.

In more current years the scouts continue the maintenance and husbandry of these precious trees as demonstrated by such activities as installation of deer fencing and expansion of the nursery to near double its original size. Now, with over 100 seedlings growing in the nursery and a recently constructed fence the next step, once the trees are mature enough, is to test resistance and propagate those successful individuals.

The nursery has several purposes. In a partnership with the PA chapter of the American Chestnut Foundation, HC is working to provide breeding stock for the ACF program that will eventually see a blight resistant strain of the species. This is accomplished through a labor intensive and time-consuming process known as backcross breeding. This project also offers HC an opportunity to work with community groups and foster working relationships / partnerships with them on a high profile endeavor in the Cooks Creek Lasting Landscape area.

The importance of the American Chestnut as a species lies in the history of the species in the region. In the early 1900's a fungus found on the Chinese Chestnut and native to Asia was inadvertently introduced into the native population of chestnut with catastrophic results. By 1940 the blight had spread throughout the entire natural range of the American Chestnut erasing the species from the forest and impacting entire industries related to forest products. More specific information can be found in the supporting material. http://www.patacf.org/bc_pgm.htm

Many businesses, agencies and organizations supported Heritage Conservancy and the Boy Scouts with this project including the Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Chestnut Foundation, Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resource's Bureau of Forestry, Haycock Lumber and the Cooks Creek Watershed Association.

Heritage Conservancy is a non-profit membership organization committed to preserving our natural and historic heritage in the greater Delaware Valley region. For more information about the conservancy and its conservation projects in the Cooks Creek Watershed and though out the greater Delaware region visit its web site at www.heritageconservancy.org. To learn more about the American chestnut tree check www.paacf.org.

