

2018 WV Chestnut Festival Recap

by Mark Double

A warm, sunny October day was the backdrop for the 11th Chestnut Festival in Rowlesburg, WV. Hot roasted chestnuts highlighted the activities in the park adjacent to the Cheat River. There were many vendors who were situated under the shade of the park pavilion. Some of the many vendors included those who sold honey, hand-crafted chestnut furniture and chestnut trees.

The WV chapter meeting of The American Chestnut Foundation took place in the Szilagyi Center at noon. Approximately 35 people attended the meeting. Highlights of the meeting included a report by Mark Double who gave an overview of chestnut research in the U.S. TACF President and CEO, Lisa Thomson, presented a report for TACF Mid-Atlantic Coordinator, Tom Saielli, who was unable to attend. Details of some of the WV chestnut orchards were mentioned along with presentations made at WV fairs, festivals and universities. New business included the need for WV germplasm conservation orchards and a discussion of potential use for property in Randolph County that was deeded to TACF. Advisory Committee member, Jimmy Jenkins volunteered to identify a forester who might survey the timber on the property. Mark Double indicated his desire in 2019 to attempt to locate the 35 sites in WV where chestnuts have been planted. If he is successful, then WV chapter members around the state will have the opportunity to maintain the plantings by mowing, weeding, etc. Treasurer Sam Muncy, showed the group a chestnut video he made and Mark Double detailed the new TACF governance rules that affect state chapters. The former board of directors will now be replaced by an advisory committee and the terms of officers have been extended to a maximum of two consecutive two-year terms.

The chestnut festival activities began at 4:00 pm with a two presentations. Dr. Jeff Skousen, West Virginia University extension specialist in land reclamation, talked about his research planting chestnut on reclaimed strip mines in WV. Skousen compared American, Chinese and hybrid chestnuts planted in brown and gray shales in addition to comparing plantings with and without peat amendments. In summary, Chinese chestnuts grew best in all situations, while brown shale provided much better growth overall. Peat amendments had no

effect on growth. Amy Metheny, graduate student in Plant and Soil Sciences at West Virginia, presented results from her research using the chestnut blight fungus that contains a virus. She initiated cankers on American chestnut trees in Garrett County, MD and compared three different treatment methods, 'paint', 'punch' and 'scratch'. The 'scratch' and 'punch' methods were better controlling canker expansion than the non-wounding 'paint' method.

The gala dinner began at 5:30 pm in the Szilagyi Center auditorium. Nearly 90 people were entertained by the Preston County High School Madrigal singers under the direction of Debra Westbrook. Don and Sheryl Kines were crowned Mr. and Mrs. Chestnut for 2018 and Nick Forman and Aluana Wilson, students at Central Preston Middle School, were named the Prince and Princess. Dr. William MacDonald, professor of forest pathology at West Virginia University, provided the keynote talk prior to dinner. The meal of pork, sweet potato casserole, Brussel sprouts and carrot cake was enjoyed by all. The cadets from the WV Challenge Academy acted as servers for the evening. Winners from the silent auction were announced at the conclusion of the evening.

The festival was a success, as those in attendance were educated at the afternoon science session and everyone greatly enjoyed festivities of the banquet. A sunny afternoon brought in visitors from near and far. Kentucky TACF members were present as they are interested in a Kentucky chestnut festival and they came to Rowlesburg to see how the festival is done in WV.