

Canadian Chestnut Council

. . . on the Chestnut Trail

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**NEWSLETTER #6
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ANNUAL MEETING - 1992

The Canadian Chestnut Council (CCC) held its 1992 Annual Meeting on November 5 at OMAF's Horticultural Experiment Station, Simcoe, Ontario. Attendance was down from 1991, but a good group of Chestnut enthusiasts gathered to hear presentations by Stan and Arlene Wirsig of the New York Chapter, American Chestnut Council, and Colin McKeen CCC Chairman.

The Wirsig's recounted New York State's activities and plans to restore the American Chestnut as a valuable timber, nut and aesthetic tree. The New York Chapter is aiming at public awareness and involvement and hopes to provide superior true to type American Chestnut stock to breeders and home orchard enthusiasts. Tissue culture is being studied as one way to develop resistant seedlings. Other resistance methods are also being monitored in conjunction with the American Chestnut Foundation and several research centers in the United States. Mr. Wirsig expressed concern re cross breeding of the American Chestnut with genes from Oriental and other non-native chestnut trees which are not nearly as valuable for timber.

Dr. McKeen reviewed his research findings re blight in Ontario. He also explained the research contribution of Martin Dunn, a student who completed his M. Sc. degree at the University of Guelph under the supervision of Dr. Greg Boland. The research on hypo virulence for biocontrol of Chestnut Blight offers a sound scientific approach.

The current aim is to determine hypovirulent strains that will convert the virulent ones to debilitated ones. Ontario has at least seven hypovirulent strains. Blighted trees that were inoculated in 1991 and 1992 will be evaluated this year.

NATIVE CHESTNUT FURNITURE

At the close of the annual meeting, a beautiful coffee table made from native chestnut was presented to Dr. Colin McKeen, by CCC director John Gartshore. This was in recognition of the leadership and hard work by Colin, in foundation of CCC and supervision of the research programs.

The table top was made from a 2-inch thick cross section of the lower trunk of a healthy chestnut tree that had been cut under a power line right-of-way, a few miles west of Ancaster, Ontario. The trunk diameter of the tree at its base was slightly more than 27 inches (68 cm). Four fine, 10 ft. logs were cut from the tree trunk. When standing, this was the largest (only by 1 cm.) blight free chestnut known to date in Ontario. Before it was felled, no member of CCC knew of its existence. The tree was 38 years old and its trunk diameter had increased by 2/3 of an inch (2 cm) annually during the last 20 years. It is hoped that there are more chestnut trees like this one, elsewhere in Ontario. If you know of any, please advise the council. The CCC will make a supreme effort to save them. A smaller tree is in jeopardy because of the extension of Highway 403 near Jerseyville in Brant County.

REGIONAL GROUPS

CCC encourages the formation of regional groups of Chestnut enthusiasts to record the locations of American Chestnut trees within their area and to assist in monitoring the development of hypovirulence and/or disease resistance in existing trees. Such groups can be of much assistance to the council in ensuring that the chestnut recovery program moves forward. If there is interest in forming a regional group in your area, please let us know.

The Norfolk Chestnut Recovery Committee has already become active in this manner. Surveys are being carried out in Norfolk and neighbouring counties to identify chestnut growth sites and to record tree health. Seed will be saved from blight-free trees and propagated at a "seed orchard" that has been established by the committee.

A SURPRISE FIND

Colin McKeen recently learned from the Eastern Ontario Nut Grower's Association that there was a small planting of American Chestnut on the National Capital Commission property just east of Ottawa. Along with several other hardwood species sixteen Chestnut trees were planted on the site in 1976. The planting was made by the Canadian Forestry Service before it was transferred to Petawawa sixteen years ago. Eight trees have survived and show reasonable thrift. Several show multiple stems with the largest having a diameter of about 5 inches (12.5 cm). After the snow melted in mid-April burrs were found on the ground at the base of the largest trees. This indicates that the American Chestnut can withstand more severe climates than was originally thought.

A NOVA SCOTIA PLANTING OF AMERICAN CHESTNUTS

Information has come to the CCC that at least 60% of the American Chestnut trees planted in the 1985-87 re-establishment program made by the Bowater Mersey Paper Company Limited have done well. The best specimens are twenty feet high and have commenced to bear nuts. Historical records show that a few American Chestnuts once grew in southern Nova Scotia.

OUTPLANTINGS OF AMERICAN CHESTNUT

Because of a genuine scarcity of seed stocks only a few and small plantings will be made in 1993. The majority of previous plantings have done reasonably well. Two 1991 plantings in southwestern Ontario suffered severely from the drought in 1991 and there may not be any survival at those two sites. One planting made in Dufferin County in 1989 and 1990 has trees ranging from 2' to 8' (1-2.5 m) high.

Most 1992 plantings have made good growth. Two test plantings using "Tubex" plastic protectors have done especially well. A few seedlings grew 1'-3' (30-90 cm) in their first season and appear to have wintered well. The tubes prevent deer browsing and ward off damage from rodents. At least one similar test will be made in 1993.

WATERING OF SEEDLINGS IN FIRST YEAR

When seeded directly, the American Chestnut produces a long tap root which is often 24" (60 cm) long when the above-ground growth may not be more than 8" or 9" (20-24 cm). Consequently, it is understandable that seedlings started in 1 litre cartons or similar containers will profit from a few timely waterings in the first year after transplanting.

FERTILIZATION AND WEED CONTROL

Chestnut plantings profit from a light application of a commercial fertilizer (10-10-10) starting in their second year. Best results are obtained by applying the fertilizer in holes punched into the soil to a depth of 10" (25 cm) but no closer than 12" (30 cm) from the tree trunk. A teaspoon of fertilizer at four sites around the tree should be adequate for a 3' (1 m) high tree. For each subsequent year of growth the amount of fertilizer may be increased and spaced farther out from the trunk.

Chestnuts grow best if no grass or weeds are allowed to grow within a radius of 1'-1.5' (30-45 cm) of the trunk for the first two or three years.

OUTPLANTINGS BEYOND THE ORIGINAL

CHESTNUT NATURAL RANGE

At a recent director's meeting of the CCC, the advisability was considered of making only minimal plantings for the next two years within the natural range where Chestnut grew abundantly. It is within this area that experiments on bio-control of the blight will be carried out. More extensive plantings will be encouraged on suitable soil types beyond this range. It is now known that the American Chestnut will survive on well drained, sandy soils in areas both east and north of its original Ontario habitat.

1993 ANNUAL MEETING OF CCC

The annual meeting of the CCC will be held during the first week of November. The site is yet to be decided upon. Mark the date on your calendar.

ANNUAL MEETING OF ACF

The tenth annual meeting of the American Chestnut Foundation (ACF) will be held October 23-24, 1993 at Meadowview, Virginia. Contact ACF, Box 6057, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV 26506, for more information.

CCC BROCHURE

Our newly revised CCC brochure is enclosed. If you would like extra brochures for distribution to potential new members, please let us know.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

Your annual dues and/or contributions are always welcome. Continued support is necessary, especially to underwrite the cost of newsletters and other CCC business. Annual fees - \$10.00; larger donations gratefully received. THANKS!

P.S. If you are paid up for 1992, there is an X on top right corner of page 1, and a double X (XX) if we've received your dues already for 1993. Persons over 2 years in arrears must be removed from our newsletter mailing list, **but your past interest and support has been appreciated!**