

The Canadian Sweet Chestnut

-Newsletter of the Canadian Chestnut Council-

Issue # 77 – October 2020



<http://www.canadianchestnutcouncil.ca>

Council Mission - to help restore the American Chestnut to the areas of Canada it once occupied.

Current Priorities

- 1) Breeding resistance
- 2) Breaking Isolation / Establishing Gene pool Nodes
- 3) DNA Analysis
- 4) Survey of existing Chestnuts in the wild

In this issue:

- Breeding resistance - Spring 2020 Planting (Dragan Galic)
- Establishing Gene Nodes update - City of Brantford (Dragan Galic, Chuck Beach)
- Breaking Isolation (Dragan Galic)
- DNA Analysis update (Brian Husband)
- Remembering Les Corkum (David Boland and Greg Boland)
- Survey - Reporting Chestnuts in the Wild Reminder
- Membership dues for 2021 (Terry Anderson)
- 32nd Annual General Meeting – Postponed

Breeding Resistance – Spring 2020 Planting (Dragan Galic)

This past spring was challenging time to organize a group to plant trees at the Tim Hortons Onondaga Farm, as the farm is essentially closed to most visitors, but planting did take place on June 4th and 5th. Our thanks to Christine Vey and John Hill who recruited Tom Horton Foundation staff. Along with our two University summer students (Robert Splinter, Cole McMorrow), 2942 seedlings were planted. Included were Native stock (227), Open Pollinated: 182, Crosses (F2): 2098, Crosses (F3): 218 and Large Nuts: 217



Establishing Gene Nodes update (Dragan Galic / Chuck Beach)– this past year, 8 sites were added bringing the total number of sites to 34. Dragan advises that 13 more sites have been identified and are awaiting the resolution of Covid-19. The purpose of the nodes is to ensure the American Chestnut gene pool survives.

One of the recent gene nodes was planted in the City of Brantford at the local Compost Facility. Volunteers planted approximately 100 saplings. Thanks goes to the City for its support and John Hill and Christine Vey for providing the planting materials that were all stored at Onondaga Farms.



A perfectly planted seedling (fibre mat and guard)



Field planted with seedlings



Volunteer Neil Dunning



John Hill & Christine Vey in delivery truck



Planting volunteers posing with masks

Breaking Isolation (Dragan Galic)

Of the few remaining American Chestnuts in the wild, many are isolated and remain unfertilized because of their isolation. To ensure the continuance of these isolated trees, the Canadian Chestnut Council undertakes to break their isolation and assist in their fertilization and bearing of fruit by planting 7 to 10 seedlings from our native stock around the circumference of the isolated tree. This past year, 3 additional sites were planted bringing the total number to 60.

DNA Analysis (Dr. Brian Husband, University of Guelph)

Previously this newsletter provided information on the development of a DNA analysis of American Chestnuts. Dr. Brian Husband provided the following update.

Graduate student, Sophia Stoltz, has completed her genetic analysis of Canadian and American populations of American Chestnut samples and has her thesis chapter fully analyzed and 85% written. She was completing the ‘extra’ samples from the west coast and Nova Scotia when covid-19 hit in March and was not allowed to complete the lab work. Now, having just completed her qualifying exam, she has returned to the lab on a reduced basis (to accommodate physical distancing in the lab) to finish those samples.

The main analysis is currently showing a relatively low number of hybrids in the ‘wild samples’, strong differentiation between the Canadian and American populations, and low-moderate differentiation among populations in southern Ontario.

Remembering Les Corkum (David Boland and Greg Boland)

Leslie Ainsworth Corkum (1922-2020) – A valued friend of the CCC



Les Corkum - at home in his kitchen. (From Saltscapes 2017)

The Canadian Chestnut Council (CCC) lost both a valued friend and source of wisdom this year when Les Corkum of Falmouth, Nova Scotia, passed away on 1 April 2020 at age 97. Les has been serving as an Honorary Director and Advisor of the CCC since 2003.

Les was well known throughout Nova Scotia because he has worn so many hats over his lifetime and touched so many people. He spent most of his working career with the former NS Dept of Lands & Forests, working in forest protection and fire management, and retired in 1981. He was also a WW2 Air Force Vet, antique collector, Christmas tree grower and apparently also a “card shark”. Les won

numerous awards and honors for his contributions to forestry and Christmas tree growing in NS, and was known as a storyteller with an impressive memory, humour and wit. Many of us have spent time at his kitchen table enjoying his stories and knowledge of all things related to trees and forests in NS.

Les started communicating with Dr. Colin McKeen and the CCC as early as the mid-1990s because of his personal interest in the American chestnut (*Castanea dentata*) story, and its historical connection to Nova Scotia. Through the years Les has stimulated an interest in many people in NS about this tree, and together they have worked to locate and document surviving American chestnut trees and their relatives (*Castanea* spp.) throughout the province. American chestnut is not considered a native tree of NS but has been planted there by various individuals and organizations over the years. Les's efforts have resulted in detailed knowledge of these trees through the province, and documented the source and original parentage of many of them. Some of these individual trees are considered true American chestnut (*C. dentata*) but others may be hybrids of American chestnut with other *Castanea* spp. known to occur in the province. The largest American chestnut tree in NS is the Ashdale tree which is thought to have been delivered to NS from New York in 1905 by a migrant worker who planted it in his father's front yard, where it stands to this day (Fig 2.). This tree is also thought to be the largest living American chestnut tree in Canada and one of the largest trees in North America. It was through the efforts of Les Corkum and his colleagues that we have developed such a strong understanding of this forest species in NS.



The Ashdale tree, NS, is the largest American chestnut tree in Canada. (Photograph by Dave M. Boland).

Les was featured in an article entitled “King of the Forest” in Saltscapes magazine in 2017 for his interest and knowledge of American chestnut. Because of this article Les has also become locally known as “King of the Forest” and will certainly be remembered as a friend of the chestnut – and the CCC.

See also:

Corkum, L. 1998. The American chestnuts of Nova Scotia: The Sweet chestnut - *Castanea dentata*. <https://www.canadianchestnutcouncil.ca/index.cfm?page=NovaScotia> and <https://www.canadianchestnutcouncil.ca/docs/Other/CorkumArticle1998.pdf>

Metcalf, Z. 2017. King of the forest. Saltscapes: June/July 2017. <https://www.saltscapes.com/roots-folks/2708-king-of-the-forest.html>

Survey of Chestnuts in the Wild. “Reporting a Chestnut in the Wild” Form

It is the time of the year when many of us venture outside and to the woods.

As mentioned in our last edition of this newsletter, the form for reporting an American Chestnut in the wild has been updated to a computer friendly fillable form. The form and instructions for completing the form may be found on the Canadian Chestnut Council website.

<http://www.canadianchestnutcouncil.ca/> under the tab, “Found a Chestnut/ Report a Chestnut”.

Of course, a print out and manual filling of the form remains an option. Please, share this information, with others that might find the form of use. Note that all locations are placed on the confidential University of Guelph data base for research purposes.

Membership Dues (Terry Anderson) – a reminder that membership dues for 2021 are due. It is the Foundation’s policy to remove members from the mailing list after three years in arrears. Dues can be forwarded to our Membership Secretary, Terry Anderson. His contact information is below.

The fee is \$25.00 and your cheque should be mailed to Terry’s new address.

Make cheques payable to: the Canadian Chestnut Council.

Please send to:

Terry Anderson

261 Sandy Brook Way,

Kingsville, ON. N9Y 0A4

32nd Annual General Meeting 2020 (postponed)

Unfortunately, the decision has been made to cancel our usual fall meeting because of the Covid-19 health concerns.

At this time, we are looking to hold an online zoom meeting with the option of joining by regular telephone on Saturday, March 6th at 10:00 a.m.

Further details to follow. **Please reserve this time on your calendar**

Want more information:

Website - www.canadianchestnutcouncil.ca

Contact - Mr. Ron Casier

Phone - 519-631-5279

Email - ronjcasier@gmail.com

Membership Secretary - Terry Anderson

Before Oct. 15 - Address - 888 Rd 3 E. Kingsville, ON.N9Y 2E5

After Oct, 15 – Address - 261 Sandy Brook Way, Kingsville, ON. N9Y 0A4

Email - andersonterry419@gmail.com

Council Directors – Chuck Beach, Ron Casier, Tim Casson, Gord Chinnick, Doug Fagan, Stan Furman, Dragan Galic, John Hill, Nathan Munn, Christine Vey.

Interim Directors – Pete Smith, Ken MacGillivray