

MINING: American chestnut trees will be planted on reclamation sites *(10/22/2008)*

Eric Bontrager, *Greenwire* reporter

The federal government will plant American chestnut trees -- a threatened and beloved species -- on mine reclamation sites under a partnership announced yesterday.

The Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement and the American Chestnut Foundation will sign a five-year agreement aimed at reforesting former coal lands in the eastern United States.

For more than 30 years, mine owners have been required under the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act to compact pulverized mine lands and plant grass to prevent erosion and reduce runoff. But those efforts have failed to produce multi-species forests that were cleared for mining.

So the Appalachian Regional Reforestation Initiative proposed an alternative: Break up the soil instead of compacting it and plant native hardwoods.

OSM Director Brent Wahlquist said the partnership between his agency and the foundation follows the success of a mining industry Arbor Day initiative that planted 11,809 chestnuts ([Land Letter](#), April 24).

Once known as the "redwoods of the East," American chestnut trees once grew from Maine to Mississippi. A blight nearly wiped out the population in the early 20th century, and fewer than 1,000 remain in the wild today.

For every American chestnut seed planted on a surface mine, up to 600 other native, high-value hardwoods -- red oak, black walnut and white oak -- may be included in the planting mix, the foundation's president and CEO, Marshal Case, said.

"As the American chestnut returns to its native forests ... and as forest health improves, species that were dramatically decreased when the chestnut was destroyed will once again rebound," Case said in a statement. "This will be a huge benefit to wildlife populations as these newly planted trees will provide on-the-ground habitat protection."