

Middle school students plant chestnut trees at reclaimed mine site

MARTIN COUNTY — Reclamation of a surface mine site in Martin County is creating another foothold in a determined campaign to re-establish the once mighty American chestnut tree.

Students from two Martin County middle schools — Warfield and Inez — planted chestnut seedlings, along with oak seedlings, at a mine site being reclaimed by Lexington Coal Co. on May 8. The site is part of the company's 17 West mining complex on Wolf Creek.

The American chestnut, once the defining tree of hardwood forests in eastern North America, was ravaged and nearly eliminated by an Asian fungus. Unwittingly allowed into this country in imported trees in the early 1900s, the blight spread quickly. By 1940, nearly all of Kentucky's American chestnuts were gone.

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Warfield Middle School students Tyler Blackburn (left) and Richard Nichols (right) and Tim Brown from the Division of Forestry and James Stacy participate in Arbor Day Event at 17 West.

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MOUNTAIN LIVING



Inez Middle School students Dustin Hammond (left) and Justin Thacker (right) participate in Arbor Day Event at 17 West on Wolf Creek on May 8.

STUDENTS

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Researchers have found that hardwood seedlings thrive in loosely compacted ground on reclaimed mine land. That technique now figures prominently in a multi-state effort — the Appalachian Regional Reforestation Initiative (ARRI) — to re-establish the American chestnut and to generally promote the planting of high-value hardwoods on reclaimed mine lands. The ARRI coalition includes citizens, industry and the federal and state governments, including Kentucky Department for Natural Resources (DNR) and its Division of Mine Reclamation

and Enforcement.

Reclamation of mined land and restoration of the American chestnut are important to Kentucky's culture as well as its environmental health, DNR Commissioner Susan C. Bush said.

"The American chestnut was once a central part of life in Kentucky and other states. Appalachia, used for everything from cradles to coffins, as the saying went," Bush said. "I'm sure that many of the students planting trees here today have ancestors who would be gratified by our reforestation initiative."

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INEZ MIDDLE SCHOOL students Dustin Hammond, left, and Justin Thacker, right, participated in the tree-planting event.

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lacks other competing materials and the high, dry location is also good for the trees.

"Surface mines will allow us numerous sites to establish founding populations that can disperse into existing forests within its natural range in Appalachia," Mike French,

vice-president of the Kentucky Chapter of the American Chestnut Foundation said.

Another way Lexington Coal Company, LLC is taking a lead role in reforestation efforts is through their participation in the Appalachian Regional Reforestation Initiative.

Kentucky is one of seven states to join the initiative, which is a coalition of industry, citizens and government. The goal is to restore forests on coal-mined lands in the eastern United States.

"Lexington Coal supports the Appalachia Regional Reforestation Initiative in our reclamation efforts," Dan Geiger, President & CEO of Lexington Coal Company said. "We seek to promote the planting of trees on our sites, and we are proud of the fact that some of the academic research that led to the FRA techniques was done here at 17 West."

Other participants in the event included Susan C. Bush, Commissioner for the Kentucky Department for Natural Resources, as well as officials from the U.S. Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement, the Kentucky Division of Forestry, and the American Chestnut Foundation.

Martin students plant trees on reclaimed site

BSN Staff Report

INEZ — Students from Inez and Warfield middle schools celebrated Arbor Day Tuesday by planting American Chestnut trees and Pin Oak trees on a reclaimed mine site in Martin County.

The reclaimed mine land is being reforested to benefit the environment and the economy, utilizing trees that are becoming endangered.

Forty-five middle school students participated in the event.

Warfield Middle School student Trevor Robinson said he learned how important trees are to the environment.

"I learned how to plant a tree," Robinson said.

Another Warfield Middle School student, Tyler Blackburn,

said he enjoyed the experience and being able to spend time with his friends.

"I learned chestnut trees were endangered and how they were trying to repopulate it," Blackburn said.

The reforestation program is a cooperative effort among the coal industry, the University of Kentucky and other universities, various federal and state agencies, land owners and local citizens. Lexington Coal Company, LLC is reclaiming this site according to specifications that improve the growth of trees.

The Forestry Reclamation Approach improves the potential for tree survival because the loosened soil allows rain to soak into the ground around the tree roots, causing them to grow about twice

the rate of trees in natural forests.

Previous reclamation guidelines left soil so compacted that water would run off the site.

The loose soil and tree plantings also help reduce flooding and run-off and helps to capture carbon dioxide, which reduces greenhouse gases.

Because more water is retained, the habitat for wildlife improves. Forests will yield harvestable timber, which will aid the local economy. It is also a vital part of the reintroduction of the chestnut tree — highly sought after in making furniture but near extinction after blight struck in the 1930s. The new species of American chestnut thrives on former mine sites because the soil