

Realistic Restoration Targets

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Chestnut giants, Great Smoky Mountains, western North Carolina. Photo was first published January 1910 in the *American Lumberman*. Courtesy of the Forest History Society, Durham, NC.



THE MISSION OF THE AMERICAN CHESTNUT FOUNDATION is “to restore the American chestnut tree to our eastern woodlands to benefit our environment, our wildlife, and our society.” An important part of the process of restoration is setting realistic goals and often these are set with knowledge of past conditions. Reference ecosystems may also be used for evaluation of progress in restoration with the reference systems representing the range of historic variation (Society for Ecological Restoration 2004).

Figure 1



Image used to illustrate the size of American chestnut in the pre-blight forests of the eastern United States.

Figure 2

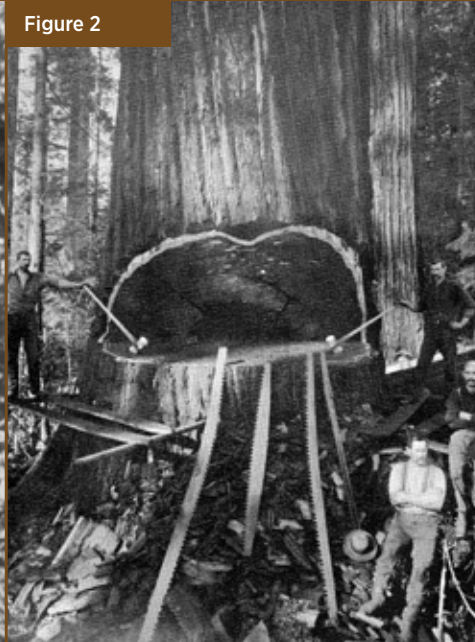


Image from the Humboldt County Historical Society archives of loggers and a redwood for comparison with images assumed to be of American chestnut in eastern forests.

Figure 3



A 7-foot chestnut tree in Laurel Fork of Cheat River (Suck Lick) Monongahela National Forest, WV, in 1923. Photo courtesy of the Forest History Society, Durham, NC (image ID# FHS3796, photographer W.E. Hedges).

These reference ecosystems and historic range of variability may be hard to define or determine, but accepted methods can include cultural evidence such as written descriptions, oral histories, maps and photographs, and survey records (Egan and Howell 2001). Another tactic is to focus on restoring species composition (such as returning the American chestnut) and ecological processes (such as prescribed fire).

Old photos can tell us much about the past, however, as the Russian proverb goes – trust, but verify. We have found that at least two photographs used to illustrate the old growth, pre-European settlement forests of West Virginia are really photographs of California redwoods (Thomas-Van Gundy and Whetsell, in press). A comparable photograph has been used by TACF and others to illustrate old growth or pre-blight American chestnut in the eastern forests of the United States (**Figure 1**). This image is like those we found in the archives of

Humboldt State University illustrating logging the redwood forest of California in the early 1910s (<http://library.humboldt.edu/humco/>). Also, much the same photos are found in the book *Logging the Redwoods* (Carranco and Labbe 1975). The similar poses of the loggers, striking white sapwood, bark thickness, and the use of spring boards all suggests that Figure 1 is of a California redwood and not an American chestnut.

In an attempt to find the original source of Figure 1, we used TinEye reverse image search. The image in Figure 1 appears on the home page of the Mendocino Coast Model Railroad and Historical Society (<http://www.mendorailhistory.org/>), but unfortunately their contact person did not know the original source for the photograph. We also contacted the Humboldt County Historical Society, in Eureka, CA. A search of their photography archives did not return a match to Figure 1, however, their collections archivist stated they

have thousands of photographs similar to Figure 1 and all are of redwoods (**Figure 2**; personal communication, Jim Garrison, Collections Archivist, Humboldt County Historical Society). There are well-documented photographs of pre-blight American chestnuts in the eastern forest, including this one from West Virginia (**Figure 3**).

To use photographs like Figure 1, to illustrate what has been lost from our eastern forests is setting us up for failure. In the digital age, the sources for many historical images are becoming easier and easier to obtain.

LITERATURE CITED

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