

News Release

Contact: Hayley Lynch
hayley.lynch@tnc.org
(502) 226-0140

Conservation Partners Reforest Former Mine Lands in Leslie County

Middlesboro, KY | March 28, 2023 — Three conservation partners teamed up today to reforest a former surface mine site in Leslie County, Kentucky. The event brought together [The Nature Conservancy](#) (TNC), [Green Forests Work](#), and [Beam Suntory](#). Approximately 100 volunteers from Beam Suntory and partners planted thousands of trees today. A total of 8,000 trees will be planted by end of day tomorrow.

The site is part of TNC's 253,000-acre [Cumberland Forest Project](#), which features an innovative conservation approach combining public recreation, sustainable timber harvest, forest carbon markets, and impact investment. The project, which spans Kentucky, Tennessee, and Virginia, contains former mine lands. Reforestation of these sites supports climate resiliency and wildlife habitat and increases forest connectivity in the continentally important migratory corridor of the Appalachian Mountains.

"We are proud to work with Green Forests Work and Beam Suntory to return native hardwood forests to former mine sites. Cumberland Forest provides an incredible opportunity not only to protect healthy existing forests but also for intensive reforestation efforts," says David Phemister, state director for TNC in Kentucky. "Restored forests provide improved wildlife habitat and water quality, jobs with site prep and planting, and future recreation and sustainable forestry opportunities."

Prior to the March 28 event, TNC and Green Forests Work planted approximately 58,000 trees across 84 acres adjacent to today's 10-acre planting site. Crews removed invasive species, ripped highly compacted soil to prepare for planting, and sowed 500 pounds of native wildflower and grass seed among the tree plantings. The project will transform open ground dominated by invasive species and poor habitat into a species-rich, shortleaf pine-upland oak woodland habitat. In addition to Beam Suntory's investment in this work, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the Arbor Day Foundation, the American Chestnut Foundation, and the Sheldon and Audrey Katz Foundation provided financial support for the project.

Most of the trees planted were white oaks and shortleaf pines, but approximately 1,500 American chestnut trees were also planted. American chestnut was completely wiped out by the 1940s due to Chestnut blight, a fungal disease native to east Asia. Researchers are trying potentially blight-resistant families for these new plantings. It will take time to re-establish this tree species on the eastern Kentucky landscape, but this planting is an important step in trying to restore American chestnuts.

Green Forests Work is a nonprofit organization with a mission to re-establish healthy, productive forests on former mine lands. Since 2009, Green Forests Work has helped plant more than 5 million trees across the Appalachian region.

"This project supports our larger effort to restore a forest type that has been declining for decades across the region," says Michael French, director of Green Forests Work. "By removing the non-native invasive species, increasing the productivity of the land and restoring native trees and shrubs, projects like this will benefit the community by improving wildlife habitat, filtering the air and water, potentially buffering storm events, and mitigating global warming by sequestering additional carbon."

Beam Suntory, a world leader in premium spirits, has furthered its support of the reforestation project, including the planting of native grasses and forbs on the former surface mine site. Beam Suntory, TNC, and other partners are also working together to support the [White Oak Initiative](#), a collaborative, science-based restoration project that seeks to stop the decline of white oak forests. Approximately 40 percent of the trees planted at the March 28 event were white oak.

"Kentucky is an important place for our people and our business, and rebuilding healthy forests is critical to protecting and regenerating the nature and biodiversity that support a thriving ecosystem," says Kim Marotta, Global Vice President, Environmental Sustainability, Beam Suntory. "Through this event and our broader partnership with TNC, we are working to increase forest connectivity and support climate resiliency and wildlife habitats in the Central Appalachian community."

As part of Beam Suntory's Proof Positive sustainability strategy, the company has made long-term commitments to support communities, consumers and nature, including an ambition to plant more trees than it harvests to make its barrels by 2030 and achieve net zero emissions by 2040. In 2022, the company planted approximately 197,700 trees globally, of which 175,000 or 88 percent were made possible through its partnership with TNC and programs including its mine land reforestation and Plant a Billion Trees programs.

High-resolution photos of the Cumberland Forest Project in Kentucky are available at <https://tnc.box.com/s/38om3kd8l2kx84ir32nhk817kc0w74cf>. Please credit photographer Mike Wilkinson.

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About The Nature Conservancy: The Nature Conservancy, founded in 1951, is a global conservation organization dedicated to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. Guided by science, we create innovative, on-the-ground solutions to our world's toughest challenges so nature and people can thrive together. We are tackling climate change and conserving lands, waters and oceans at unprecedented scale. Working in more than 70 countries and territories, we use a collaborative approach that engages local communities, governments, the private sector, and other partners. To learn more, visit www.nature.org/kentucky or follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#).

About Green Forests Work: Green Forests Work (GFW) was established with a mission to re-establish healthy and productive forests on formerly mined lands in Appalachia by converting reclaimed, non-native grasslands and shrublands into healthy, productive forestland, and a vision to create renewable and sustainable multi-use resources that provide economic opportunities while enhancing the local and global environment. To date, working with funders, conservation partners, contractors, volunteers, and friends, GFW has planted over 5 million trees on over 9,000 acres in the Appalachian region and beyond. To learn more, please visit greenforestswork.org, or follow us on [GFW Facebook](#), [GFW Instagram](#), and [Twitter](#).

About Beam Suntory: As a world leader in premium spirits, Beam Suntory inspires the brilliance of life by delivering great consumer experiences through its world-class portfolio of brands. Known for its craftsmanship of premium whiskies, including Jim Beam®, Maker's Mark®, Basil Hayden® and Knob Creek® bourbons; Japanese whiskies, including Yamazaki®, Hakushu®, Hibiki® and Toki™; and leading Scotch brands including Teacher's, Laphroaig® and Bowmore®, Beam Suntory also produces leading brands such as Courvoisier® cognac, Tres Generaciones®, El Tesoro® and Hornitos® tequila, Roku™ and Sipsmith® gin, Canadian Club® whisky, and is a world leader in ready-to-drink cocktails, with brands like -196 and On The Rocks® Premium Cocktails.

A global company with approximately 6,000 employees in more than 30 countries, one of Beam Suntory's core values is Growing for Good and through its Proof Positive sustainability strategy, the company has committed to ambitious goals and investments to promote environmental sustainability in its operations, ensure the company has a positive impact on the communities where employees live and work, and programs to educate and inform consumers to make the right personal choices about drinking. Headquartered in New York City, Beam Suntory is a subsidiary of Suntory Holdings Limited of Japan. For more information on Beam Suntory, its brands, and its commitment to social responsibility, please visit www.beamsuntory.com and www.drinksmart.com.