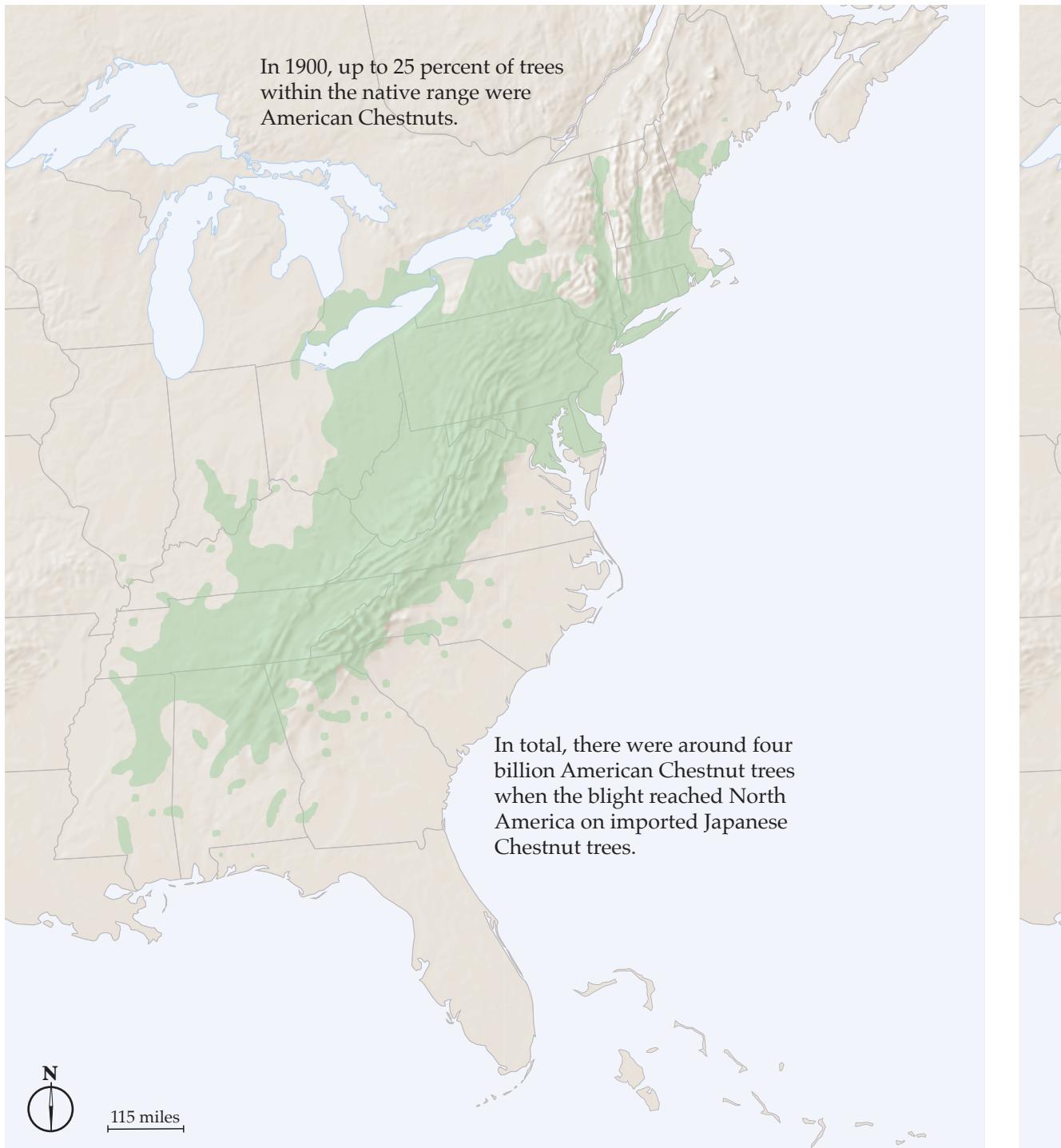


The Last Survivors of the American Chestnut Blight

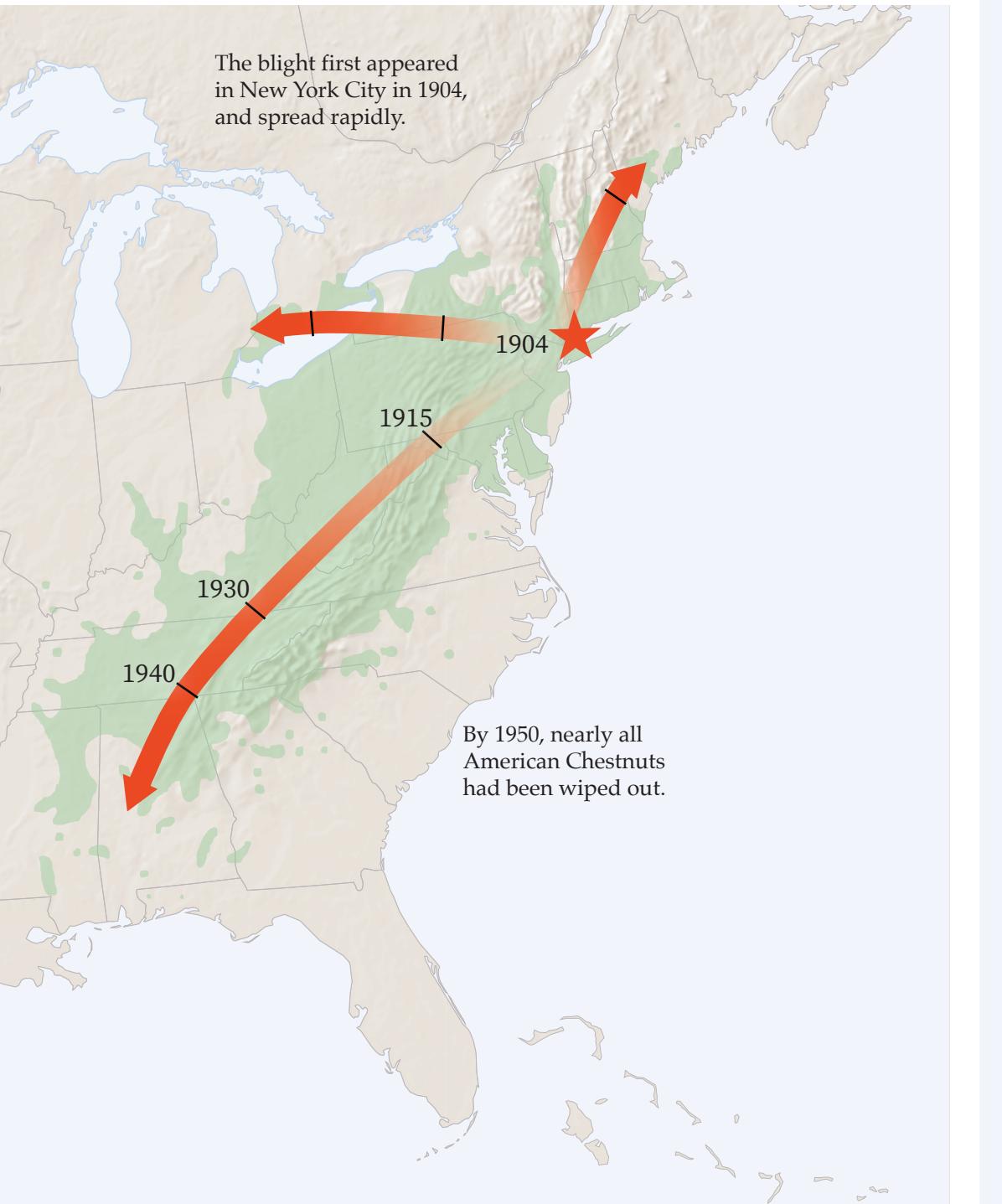
Data Sources: American Chestnut Foundation, Natural Earth, Wikipedia.
Cartography by Benjamin Dohan



Native Range of the American Chestnut

The American Chestnut (*Castanea dentata*) was once a treasured natural resource. Known as the "redwoods of the east," they could grow to be 100 feet tall and 10 feet in diameter. Chestnut wood was versatile and high quality. The trees also valuable because they grew faster

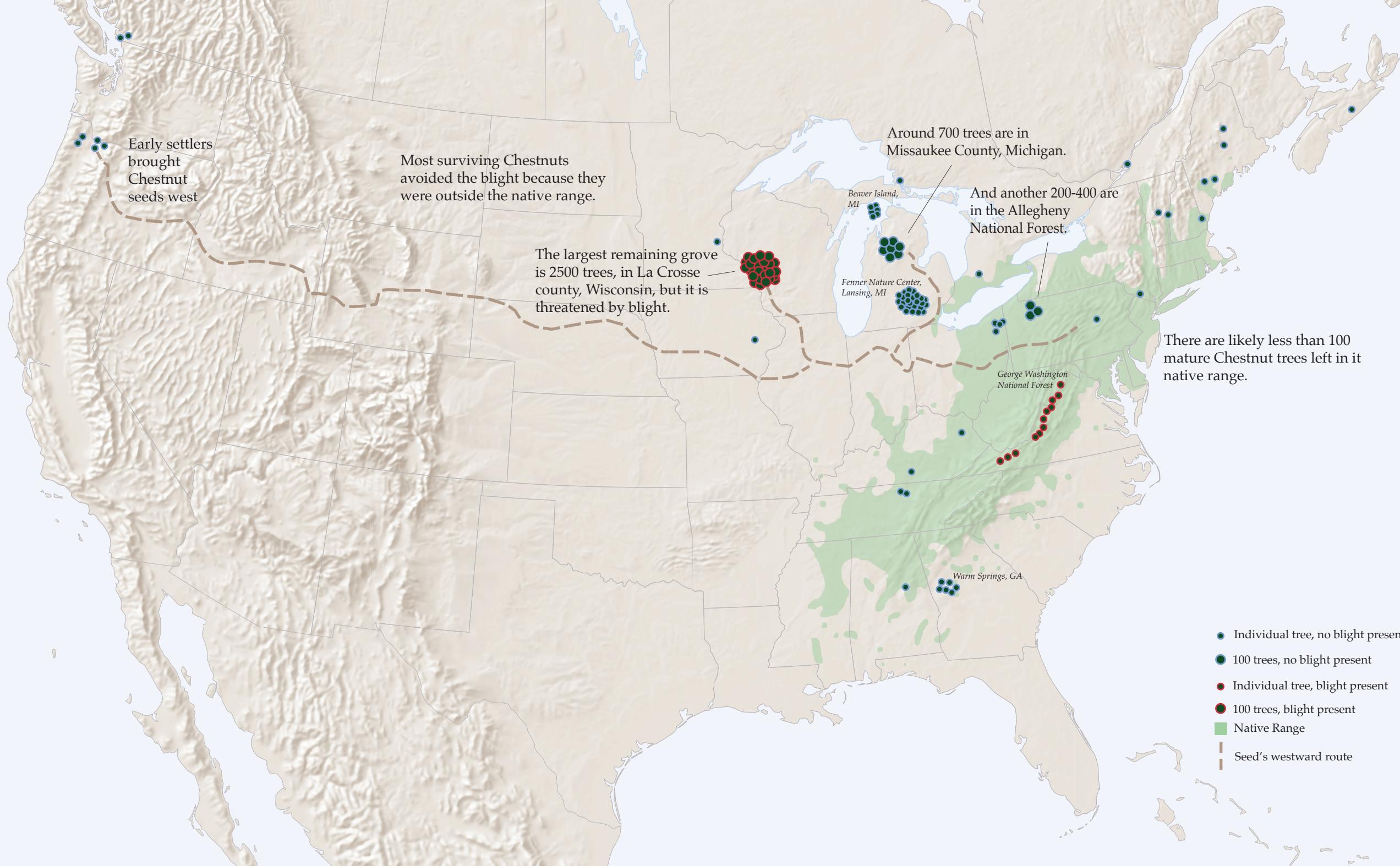
than other hardwoods, such as oak. The chestnuts themselves were popular as a roasted snack, and also fed wildlife and livestock. Many of the indigenous peoples of the eastern United States relied on Chestnuts as a staple crop.



Spread of the Blight

The American Chestnut is now critically endangered due to the pathogenic fungus *Cryphonectria parasitica*, commonly known as chestnut blight. The fungus is endemic to East Asia, where Chinese and Japanese Chestnuts evolved alongside the virus and are resistant. The American trees had

no such resistance, and the blight swept across the eastern United States in less than half a century, forcing the logging industry and ecosystems alike to adapt quickly.



Mature Chestnut Trees Remaining in the Wild

There are less than 4,000 mature pure American Chestnut trees left, and blight has been found around many of them. There are thousands more stumps that are able to grow new stalks, spread all across the old native range. The blight doesn't affect the roots, but it remains present in other

trees, and these stalks are almost always killed before they are able to reproduce. While the situation is bleak, a non-profit called the American Chestnut Foundation is trying to save the species. They are using cross-breeding with Chinese Chestnuts, along with biotechnology, to improve

the blight resistance of trees, and have created a hybrid tree that is almost entirely American Chestnut, but has improved blight tolerance. The American Chestnut Foundation created their first breeding orchard in Meadowview, VA, in 1989, and now has thousands of modified American

Chestnut trees in orchards across the eastern United States. The hope is that, eventually, these trees will be able to be introduced into the wild and the "redwoods of the east" will return to their former glory.