# **OVERVIEW OF NATIONAL CHAMPION TREES**

**P. Eric Wiseman, Ph.D. Associate Professor of Urban Forestry, Virginia Tech State Coordinator of Virginia Big Tree Program** 

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**ASCA Presents:** 

WEBINAR

Champion Trees: Expert Panel Discussion Brian French, Steve Nimz, & Eric Wiseman, Ph.D. October 21, 2021





# **AGENDA FOR THIS OVERVIEW**

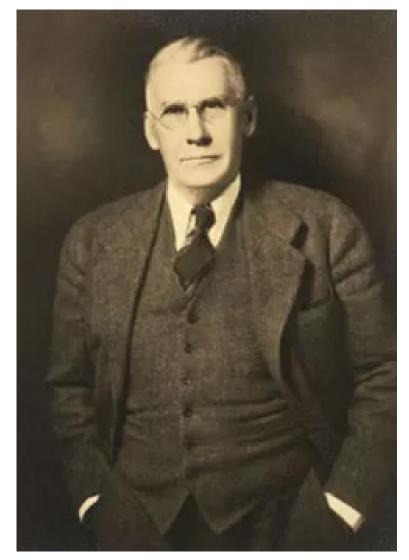
- Background of National Champion Trees
- The National Register of Champion Trees
- Measuring and Scoring of National Champion Trees
- My top-three favorite National Champions in Virginia



### Champion Trees: Expert Panel Discussion

Brian French, Steve Nimz, & Eric Wiseman, Ph.D.

# BACKGROUND



**Frederick Wilson Besley** 

Source: www.stateforesters.org



- **Maryland's first state forester**
- **Graduate of Yale School of Forestry and mentored by Gifford Pinchot**
- Helped create Maryland's Roadside Tree Law in 1914
- Helped create Maryland's Big Tree Program in 1925
- **Created the measurement and scoring system used** today nationally for crowning champion big trees

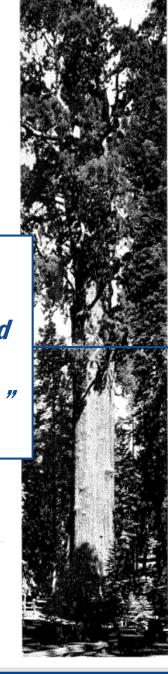
### Champion Trees: **Expert Panel Discussion**

Brian French, Steve Nimz, & Eric Wiseman, Ph.D.

## BACKGROUND

"The American Forestry Association heartily endorses the appeal by Mr. Joseph L. Stearns for the discovery and preservation of the largest specimens of outstanding American tree species." ~ September, 1940

WEBINAR



### WANTED!

The Location and Measurement of the Largest Specimens of the Following American Tree Species

Ash Mountain White Aspan, trambling Basswood Beeck, American Birch Black Peper Yellow Buckeye Butternut Cetalpa Cedar Eastern red Eastern vhite Incesse Port Orford Western red Cherry, black Chest, black Chest, black Chestnut, American Cotonwood Eastern Wastern Wastern Wastern Wastern Cucumber Cypress	Degwood, flowering Elm American Slippery Fir Alpine Balsam Douglas Lowlend white Red Silver Western white Gern Bleck Red Hackberry Hamlock Carolina Eastern Mountain Western Hickory Bitternet Pignut Shagbark Holly, American Horse Chestnut Junigar	Lerch Eastern Western Locust Black Honey Maple Bigloaf Rod Silver Sugar Magnolia, leurel Oak Bur California white Chestnut Eastern live Oregon white Pin Rod Scarlet Swamp white Willow Otage orange	Pine Digger Jeck Jeffery Lobiolly Lodgepole Longleaf Northern white Pinon Pitch Pond Ponderosa Red Shortleaf Slash Sugar Virginia Western white Winte bark White bark Sossefras Spruce Block Bluc Engelmann Red Sita White Sycamore, American
	· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·	Osage orange Pecan Persimmon	

The American Perestry Association heartily endorses the appeal by Mr. Joseph L. earns, on the opposite page, for the discovery and preservation of the largest speci ns of outstanding American tree species. Such a conservation activity, it is believed, ill have incalculable benefits, not only in stimulating greater tree appreciation, but in stablishing a nation-wide laboratory for tree and forestry studies by future generations arthermore, these old monarchs, protected from fire, disease and the ax, will stand to e end of their natural lives as cherished landmarks in the sega of America

The Association, therefore, gladly takes leadership in a national program to locate and preserve the largest specimens of the most important American frees. (To the hundred specified trees listed above others may be added.) Permanent records of these specimens will be compiled and maintained for this and future generations; these records will be made immediately available to the public through the pages of AMERICAN FORESTS. Furthermore, every effort will be made to gain the active cooperation of landowners, lumbermen, and professional foresters and other conservationists, as well as national, state and local conservation agencies.

But the success or failure of this undertaking will rest largely upon the active participation of tree lovers everywhere. Therefore, if you know of a very large tree make it your business to see that its full and accurate record is sent to The American Forestry Association: its identity as to species, its diameter or circumference four and a half feet above the ground, its height, its state of preservation, and, particularly, its location and ownership. If professional assistance for accurate identity and measurements is needed, solicit the aid of your state or local forester, or an experienced lumberman. Also, be sure to send the Association a photograph of the tree and nominate it as a candidate for "Biggest Tree" of its species.

In this way, and with your assistance, it is hoped to establish and preserve not only the largest specimens of our most important trees in the country as a whole, but abo in each individual state. When the largest specimens of each species have been definitely determined. The American Forestry Association will issue appropriate certificates both to their discoverers and to their owners. Act new to save the largest specimens of America's trees. Send records and pictures to The American Forestry Association, 919 - 17th Street, N. W., Washington, D. C.

THE GENERAL SHERMAN TREE Largest and aldest living thing. 36 feet 6 inches in diameter at the base. (Sequela gigantea)

d Park Service

### LET'S FIND AND SAVE THE BIGGEST TREES

ONE OF THE most tragic stories in the history of American forests is now in the making. It hasn't been written in its final form, but our children will live to see that day unless something is done. I refer to the gradual disappearance of our most magnificent remaining tree specimens. The giants I have in mind are not necessarily the big redwoods of the West Coast; nor are they the well known famous and historie trees. Such trees are in the main well protected. I refer to the giants scattered throughout our remaining virgin forest stands, most of which are now inaccessible to the public because they are in private ownership.

At this moment I can think of several unusually large oaks, gums, sycamores, and pines that should be given special protection. In one restricted location in southeast Georgia I came across a mill that is, to my knowledge, now cutting the last original growth red bay trees in the United States. When logging operations have

been completed there will be no red have in the country worthy of elassification above shrubs. Shall we sit idly by while this is being done? I believe that a few of our biggest specimens of each tree species should be singled out, marked, plotted on timber maps, and preserved. All lumber company employees should be notified that such trees are not to be cut, damaged by felling adjacent trees, or searred by careless axmen. Railings should be erected around them; the ground should be cleared of fire hazards for a reasonable distance in every direction, and, when possible, a plowed strip of ground should be maintained as a further fire protective measure. This done, many of our finest specimens could be preserved for their natural lives. Then future generations would be able to see matured specimens of each tree species. If things go on as they are now this will never be possible.

Let me relate the story of a grand old tulip, or yellow poplar tree that fought for its existence for hundreds of years and, finally, through the earelessness of man, crushed to the ground in a fiery blaze one night in 1934.

Back in 1792, when the first settlers made their way into western North Carolinn, the mountains were covered with an endless jungle of massive hardwood trees. The principal occupations at first, of course, were clearing land and making homes. But soon the sawmills camesmall, crude affairs in those early days. Transportation of logs was by oxen, and the strength of these beasts, contrary to the popular expression, "strong as an ex," was pitiful in comparison to a mod-

SEPTEMBER, 1940

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#### October 21, 2021

#### By JOSEPH L. STEARNS

ern tractor. For this reason the largest trees were left standing. Equipment then could not handle the big logs. As time went on larger mills made their appearance. These operations brought in overhead skidders and donkey engines, and most of the hardwoods up to six feet in diameter were easy prey.

But up on the steep slopes of Craggy Mountain fifteen miles northeast of Asheville, there was one lordly yellow poplar that towered above all the great trees around it. No sawmill in the South could have handled such a log without blasting it in quarters, for its trunk was more than twelve feet in diameter, breast high, and not a limb emerged from its straight, massive shaft for a hundred feet above the ground.

Lumbermen in the early days passed this tree by because it was too big to handle. Those in later years would no doubt have cut it, even though they would have found it necessary to (Continuing on page 416)



All that remains of the world's largest tulip, or yellow poplar. Locat-ed near Weaverville, North Caroline, it was killed by fire in 1934

## BACKGROUND



### **Lillian M. Cromelin**

- Associate editor of American Forests Magazine
- Created the initial program for registering big tree champions in 194





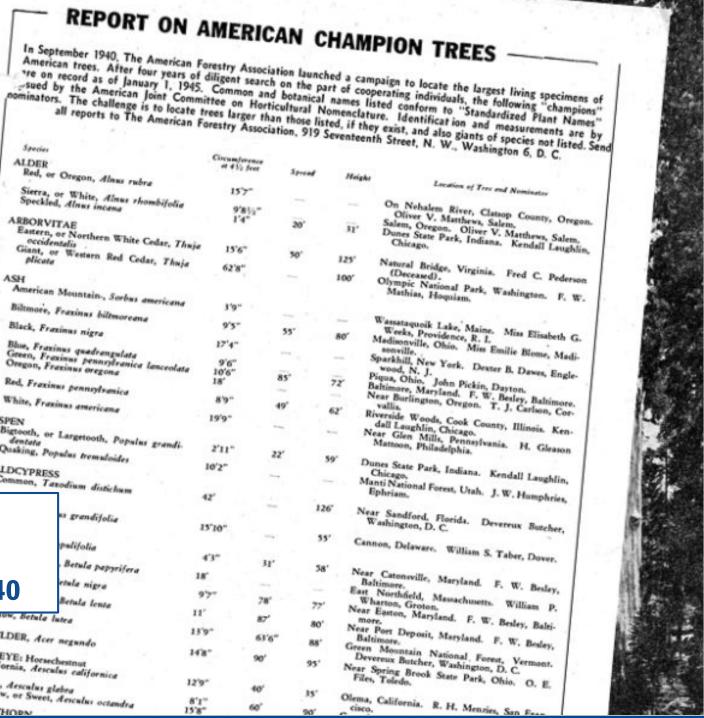
## REPORT ON AMERICAN CHAMPION TREES

In September 1940, The American Forestry Association launched a campaign to locate the largest living specimens of American trees. After four years of diligent search on the part of cooperating individuals, the following "champions" is an another of the second at of the second at a formation and botanical names listed conform to "Standardized Plant Names" American trees. After four years of diligent search on the part of cooperating individuals, the following "champions" "re on record as of January 1, 1945. Common and botanical names listed conform to "Standardized Plant Names" "sued by the American Joint Committee on Horticultural Nomenclature. Identification and measurements are by minimums. The challenge is to locate trees larger than these listed if they exist and also signification and measurements are by

ALDER Red, or Oregon, Almus rubra	Circum/or A 4 15			
Red, or Oregon, Alass rubra				
Alnus rubra			week .	10.00
				Height
Sierra, on With	157	-		
Speckled, Alnus incana	-			- On
	9'8	56 <sup>-</sup>		0
ARBORVITAE	1.4	2	0"	Sale
Eastern, or Northern With				31' Dur
Eastern, or Noethern White Cedar, Thuje	15'6"			C
Giant, or Western Red Cedar, Thuja plicata	12.0	50	r.	125' No.
percara couar, Thuja	62'8"			14.400
ASH			1.1	100' Olyn
American Mountein-, Sorbay americana				Ma
Sorbus dmericana				
Biltmore, Fraxinus biltmoreand	3'9"			
Pl. 1	9'5"			- Wassa
Black, Frazinas nigra	*2	55'		We
Blue Frank	17'4"			or a distance of the second se
Blue, Fraxinus quadrengulata Green, Fraxinus				FORM
Green, Fraxinus quadrengulata Oregon, Fraxinus pennsylvanica lanceolata Oregon, Fraxinus oregona	9'6"			Spark
	10'6"	85"	3 - S	Piqua,
Red. Fraxinus pennsylvanica	18'		7.	2 Baltime
White	8'9"			Near B
White, Fraxinus americana		49"	62	vallis
ASPEN	19'9°			HIVE SID
Birtant		-		Near G
Bigtooth, or Largetooth, Populas grandi-				Matto
Quaking, Populas tremuloides	2'11"	22'		
remulaides	and an	**	59	Dunes St
	10,5	-		Chicas
Common, Taxodium distichum			-	Manti No
STATE FININ	12'			Ephria
12.51 (1995) UK - 10 (1995)		1000	126'	
as grandifolia				Near Sar
1	5'10"			Washin
		100	55'	Canada
pulifolia	100.00			Cannon, I
Bernla	(3*	31'		
Berula papyrifera 18	e		58'	Near Cate
		1000		Baltimore
	7"	-		East North
Betula lente		78'	77'	Wharton
11' Betala latea 11'		87'		Near Easter more.
		-	80'	Near Pour 1
BOXELDER, Acer negundo	·	63'6"	88'	Etal timester
BUCKENE				Careen Mon
		90'	95'	Devereux
California, Aescalus californica				Near Spring
	•			Files, Tole
Yellow, or Sweet		40'	35'	Olama and
Yellow, or Sweet, Aesculus octandra 8'1' BUCKTHOOD 15'20		60'		Olema, Califa
BUCKTHOPN 15'8"		-	901	e suco,

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# **THE NATIONAL REGISTER**

### **1940: American Big Trees**

## **1961: The Social Register of Big Trees**

## **1978: The National Register of Big Trees**

**2014: The National Register of Champion Trees** 

WEBINAR



John Woolcott made of a new champion golden chinquapin tree on a form in Cottage Grave, Oregon

Exactly two years ago, the old Social Register of Big Trees became the National Register. This reflected a serious effort at AFA to make an interesting list of "champion" trees into a comprehensive symbol of successful conservation.

The list has come a long way since 1940, when AMERI-CAN FORESTS first sent out a call for nominations. The t Social Register was published in 1945 with 100 -recies; we now have more than seven times that number. The inauguration of the National Register marked a new effort toward generating more participation in big-tree programs on the state level. We contacted representatives of all 50 states, and we now have big-tree coordinators in all but nine states. (Those nine without coordinators are Arizona, California, Colorado, Kansas, Nevada, North Dakota, Washington, and West Virginia.)

The biggest recent change in the National Register was sparked by the long-awaited publication last year of Elbert L. Little's Checklist of United States Trees (Native and Naturalized). With the new Checklist in hand, we have weeded the Register, pulling out those species that are not considered native or naturalized in the U.S. This process should make the National Register more representative of American trees.

We have sought out champions for those eligible species that are not yet represented in the Register. Included in this supplement, for the first time, is a list of those species. We hope people will go out and find the champions. LIST I

These are the changes to the 1978 National Register. The entries are in three categories: new-species list-ings, corrections to the last Register, or new champions or a species previously recognized TI

nese species-all recognized as native or naturalized in the United States-are those for which no champion has been nominated. In order to have a representative for every recognized tree, we need your help in finding champions for these trees. LIST III

These species are, for one reason or another, no longer considered eligible for inclusion in the National Register. Some species, such as the Boynton hawthorn (Crataegus boyntonii), are no longer considered separate, distinct species. The Boynton is now considered a variation of the Biltmore hawthorn (Crataegus intricta.) The former champion Boynton and all its challengers will be listed under the Biltmore hawthorn. The largest tree, of course, will be the champion. Some trees, such as the Bender oak (Quercus xhen-

deri), are simply no longer considered species; their champions have not been listed under another species. Other trees, such as the flamboyant tree (Delonix regia) were accepted originally in the Register because

they were included in Mary Franklin Barrett's Common Exotic Trees of South Florida. We are no longer using that book to determine the eligibility of exotic species.

In his most recent Checklist, Dr. Little does not consider some species naturalized in the U.S. But some species may in fact be naturalized in specific areas of the country. We are willing to recognize those trees in the Register if an authority can be cited stating that the species is naturalized in the area from which the tree is

AFA's Big Trees office will send you a free brochure that tells how to measure and nominate a potential champion. For a complete list of the National Register, send \$1.40 (this includes postage) to AFA. You may also want a copy of E.L. Little's *Chechlist of United States Trees.* It's available for \$10 from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402. Request stock number 001-000-03846-0

Dorothy Behlen



1980 Supplement to the

OF

## NATIONAL REGISTER **BIG TREES**



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### October 21, 2021

#### AMERICAN BIG TREES

are the largest of their species reported up to March 1 in The Ameriation's campaign to locate and preserve the giant specimens of Ameriallenge to all tree lovers is to locate and report trees larger than those Reports on giants of species not listed are also desired. Send all inmerican Forestry Association, 919 17th St., N. W., Washington, D. C.

ference 1/2 feet	Spread	Height	Location of Tree and Nominetor	
0'2"			Nanti National Forest, Utah. J. W. Humphries, Su. pervisor.	
5		1.111	Albert Morrill Property, Albemarle County, Virginia. G. M. Dillard, Scottsville.	- the
3'1"			Fountain Park, Piqua, Ohio. John Pickin, Dayton, Hockessin, Delaware. William S. Taber, Dover.	- 3
5'5"			Hockessin, Delaware. William S. Taber, Dover.	1
5'10''			Cannon, Delaware. William S. Taber, Dover.	1
3'			Convent of the Visitation, Washington, D. C.	
7'3'''			Near Coldwell Corners, Delaware. William S. Taber,	
2'8"		100'	Dover. Near Lake Quinault, Olympic National Park, Wash- ington, F. W. Mathias, Hoquiam.	1000
5'8"	73'	60'	Worton, Maryland. F. W. Besley, Baltimore.	
8'	40'		Old Portage Trail, Akron, Ohio. Fred Smoyer, Akron.	
9'8"	70'	55'	Near Clyde Cover Ranch, Thermopolis, Wyoming. O. F. Ludtke, Thermopolis,	
2'		126'	Near Sanford, Florida. Devereux Butcher, Washing-	
5'8"			ton, D. C. L. F. Ventress Property, Woodville, Mississippi. J. R. Hamilton, Woodville.	
8	97'	147	The Wethersfield Elm, Middletown, Connecticut.	
7'2"		90'	Dr. Nelson W. Barker Property, Rochester, Minna- sota, Dr. Nelson W. Barker.	
4'6"		105'	Near Madison, Alabama. Thomas Z. Atkeson, Jr., Washington, D. C.	
8' 7'2"		114'	Near Elbe, Washington. Charles Lutkins, Elbe. Priest River Experimental Forest, Idaho. Elers Koch. Missoula, Montana.	
1'2" 4'7"	71' 71'	77' 101'	College Park, Maryland. F. W. Besley, Baltimore. Near Easton, Maryland. F. W. Besley, Baltimore.	
2'4"	68'	72'	Near Vinton, Maryland. F. W. Besley, Baltimore.	
16'9"			Katiksu National Forest, Idaho. Elers Koch, Missou- la, Montana.	
7'10''		Arr	Wicomico County, Maryland. Harry Ericksson, Had- donfield, New Jersey.	
10'10"	61'	55'	Near Collington, Maryland. F. W. Besley, Baltimore.	
			Stanislaus National Forest, California. J. R. Hall,	
40'11"		80'	Sonora.	
21'6"		35'	Logan Canyon, Utah. R. P. McLaughlin, Logan.	
11'1″	71'	76	Near Hickory, Maryland. F. W. Besley, Baltimore.	
23'			Lolo National Forest, Montana. Elers Koch, Missoula.	
13'5" 12'11"	67'	73'	Broadkill Neck, Delaware. William S. Taber, Dover. Fell Property, Baltimore, Maryland. F. W. Besley, Baltimore.	
19'2"	70'	70'	Teinity National Forest, California. A. G. Brenners, Weaverville.	
11'10"			H. H. Carter Property, Hampton, South Carolina. Cleary M. Haithcock, Badin, North Carolina.	
7'11"	36'	92'	S. C. Masson Property, Baltimore, Maryland. F. W. Besley, Baltimore.	

AMERICAN FORESTS

# **THE NATIONAL REGISTER**

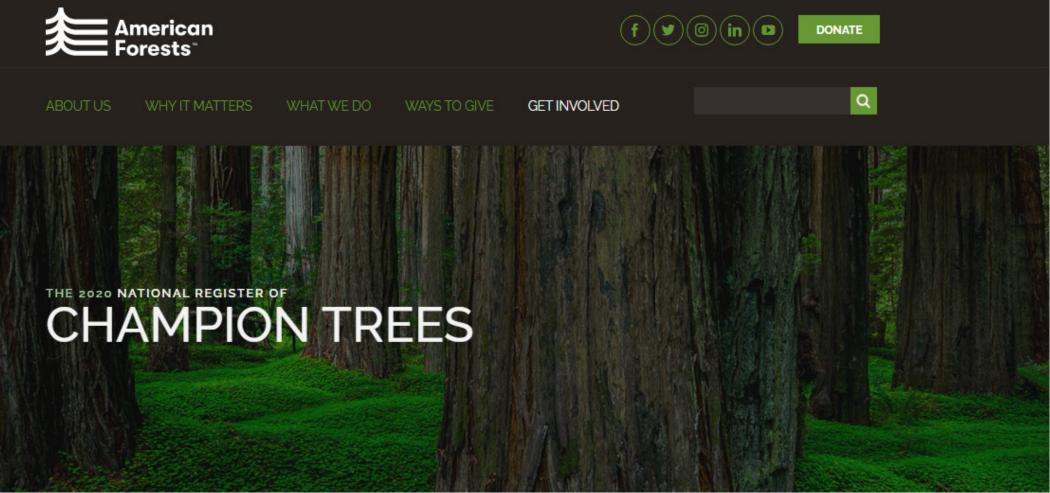
## **2020 Register**

asca

WFBINAR

- 761 champion and co-champion trees
- 543 native and naturalized species and sub-species
- 42 states have at least one champion tree
- Top-5 states are VA, FL, TX, AZ, and CA
- Currently 188 eligible species are without a champion





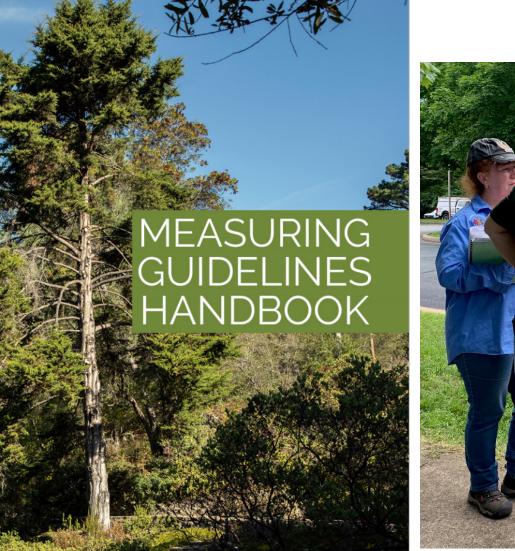
### The Official 2020 Register

Welcome to the National Register of Champion Trees! Search the register below to see Champion Trees by species or look to see which ones are in your state. You can even search Champion Trees by size or total points. The Champion Trees in the National Register are the biggest of their species as reported to American Forests in the most current year. If you would like to view the complete 2020 National Register of Champion Trees in a printable PDF spreadsheet it can be downloaded here.

### SEARCH OPTIONS

### **Champion Trees: Expert Panel Discussion**

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1. It's living 2. It's an eligible species

total points



NATIONAL REGISTER

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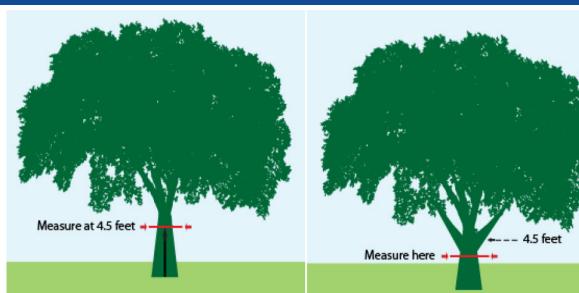
October 21, 2021

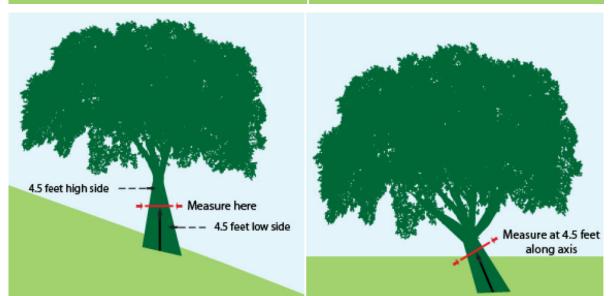
## 3. It's the largest of its species 4. It's been verified by an expert

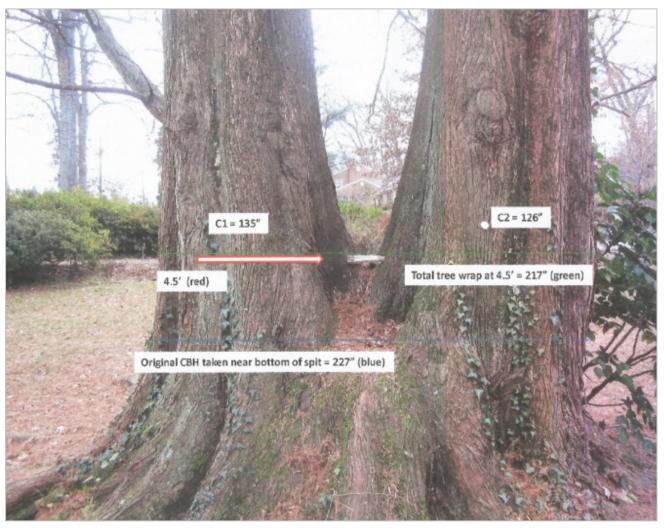
### **Champions: one tree with the most**

## **Co-Champions: two trees that are** within 3 points or 3% of each other

## **TRUNK CIRCUMFERENCE**







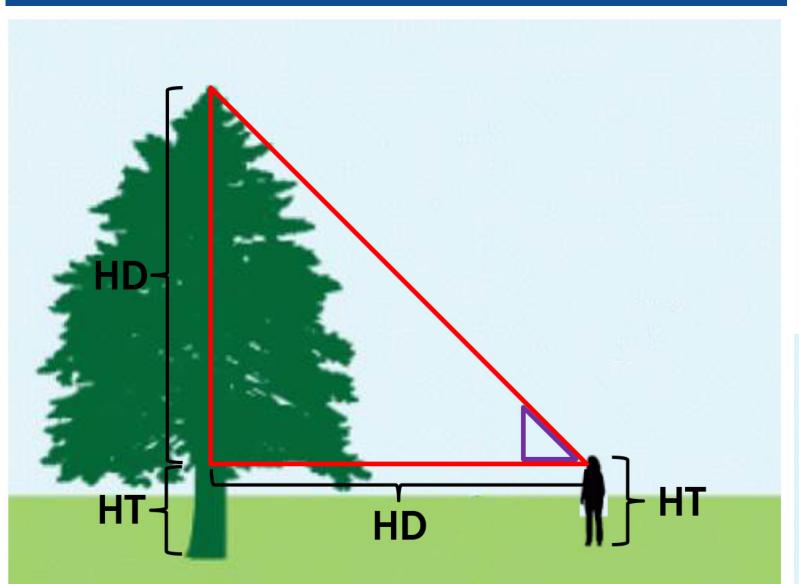
**Composite functional circumference** measurement on multi-trunk form when it is atypical for the species



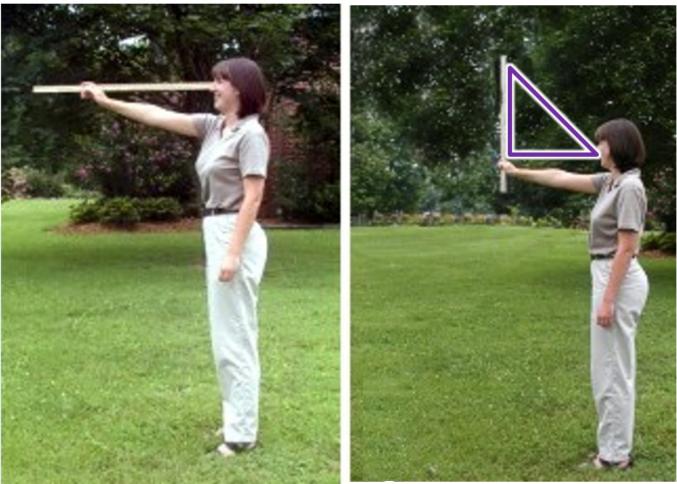
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### **TREE HEIGHT**



The tree height equals your horizontal distance (HD) from the tree plus your height (HT)

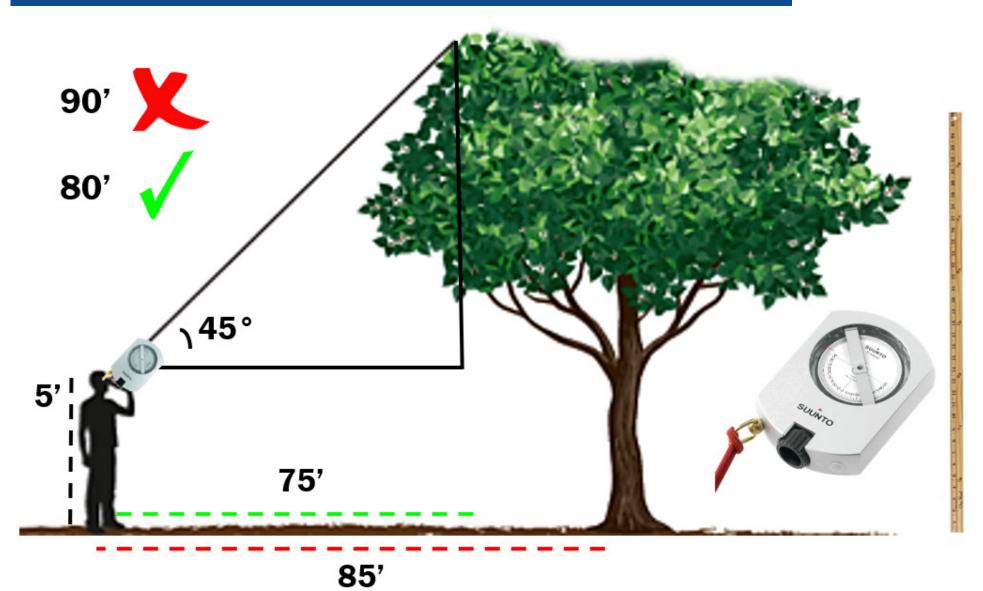




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### TREE HEIGHT





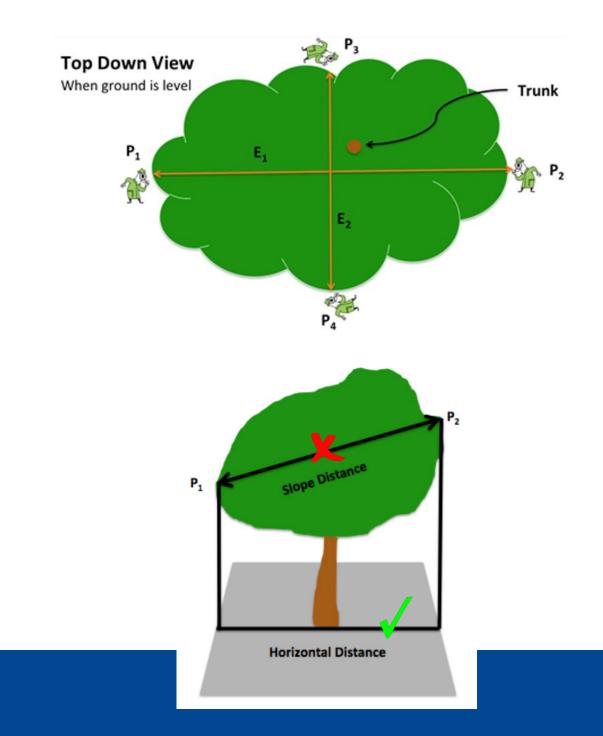
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### **AVERAGE CROWN SPREAD**







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### **SCORE CALCULATION**

- Is it an eligible tree? Eligible species, Eligible trunk form
- Measure trunk circumference at 4.5' above ground line\*:
- Measure tree height from ground line to highest branch:
- (90', 70')  $\circ$  Measure <u>average crown spread</u> (1<sup>st</sup> max.  $\perp$  2<sup>nd</sup> max.): 80 (feet)

<b>Big Tree Score Total</b>		270 points
+ Crown spread	( <sup>1</sup> /4 point per foot)	20 points
+ Height	(1 point per foot)	<b>100 points</b>
Circumference	(1 point per inch)	<b>150 points</b>



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## **150** (inches)

## **100**(feet)

## **TOP-3 FAVORITE CHAMPS IN VA**





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## **O**sage-orange (Maclura pomifera)

- **Charlotte County**
- 93' crown spread
- 328" trunk girth

### Mabel O. Bellwood John McCormick

# **TOP-3 FAVORITE CHAMPS IN VA**



**Co-champ** 110' height **252**" trunk girth **391** points 1986?

**Richard Salzer** 



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## **American elm** (Ulmus americana)

- **City of Chesapeake**
- **116' crown spread**

# **TOP-3 FAVORITE CHAMPS IN VA**





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## **Cherrybark oak** (Quercus pagoda)

- Champ
- **City of Portsmouth**
- **114' height**
- 138' crown spread
- 331" trunk girth
- **480 points**
- **Byron Carmean Gary Williamson**

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