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Pre-European settlement forest composition in the southern Appalachians

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Volunteer Oral Presentation

In the United States our understanding of pre-European settlement vegetation largely originates from public survey records where witness trees and bearing trees were identified on a landscape that was not yet influenced by European settlers. Reconstructions from the southeastern United States are noticeably fewer in number because many of the courthouses which hold these records were burned during the American Civil War. This study presents a reconstruction of pre-European settlement vegetation from a county in Virginia in the southern Appalachian Mountains for which survey records exist from the late 1700s and early 1800s. These records describe a forest that was dominated by *Quercus alba* *Castanea dentata* *Quercus velutina* and *Quercus montana*. This reconstruction identifies the importance that the chestnut blight and fire suppression had on changes in species composition and structure that exist in today's southern Appalachian forests.