
2016 Cooperator of the Year

Chip Chapman and Sang Curtis of Gilsum, NH

Each year the Cheshire County Conservation District honors an individual, business or organization with the “Cooperator of the Year” award. This is done to celebrate the efforts the recipient has undertaken to steward the natural resources on their land in cooperation with the Conservation District and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). This year we are happy to announce Chip Chapman and Sang Curtis of Gilsum, NH as our 2016 Cooperator of the Year.



Chip and Sang own and manage SkyWood Farm and Forest, 150 acres of land that has been under their stewardship since 1985. It is adjacent to conservation land and part of a large forested block within the ecologically significant Quabbin to Cardigan wildlife corridor. Chip grew up in Vermont and has lived in the Northeast all his life; he is a forester and a logger and is responsible for the forest management of their property. Sang grew up in NH with parents that loved the outdoors and nature and had her out tapping trees, gardening, picking grapes and making jelly. Their influence has helped shape Sang into the avid gardener and homesteader she is today.

They started working with the USDA NRCS and Soil Conservationist Wendy Ward on forestry and wildlife enhancement practices in 2008. Since that time Chip has written a Forest Management Plan for the property and they have completed 25 practice instances of 7 NRCS conservation practices including Forest trails and Landings, Stream Crossing, Brush Management, and over 60 acres of Forest Stand Improvement that Chip himself marks and cuts with another sawyer. They have employed four people working on timber stand improvement over the years on their property. Wendy and Chip worked together to write a Pest Management Plan to control the woody invasive plants in the fields and woodlands of SkyWood. Wendy shared “I enjoy working with Chip and our conservation conversations. He tries to strike a balance between harvesting timber and maintaining and enhancing the delicate ecology of the forest. He sees the little and big picture - he has a local, regional, global view of everything he ponders and adopts.” Chip has also shared that he has

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received a great education through his relationship with Wendy and he has evolved to have a strong focus on wildlife conservation.

When discussing their property management Chip stated “I feel blessed to be able to do all the work on the property as the landowner, logger, and forester.” Their home and outbuildings were built with wood that was harvested and milled on their property with their own saw mill. Chip shared that “I mill the wood and Sang builds with it. Sang is the carpenter.” All other wood from the property has gone to firewood or local mills.

Chip and Sang have a true commitment to wildlife. They have adopted non-chemical methods to control the invasive plants on the property and have opened up their land for educational workshops in partnership with UNH Cooperative Extension. They have also worked to create over five acres of early successional habitat to provide young forest for declining bird species. Chip and Sang have created pollinator habitat

with organic site preparation and meadow seedings as well as established native pollinator friendly perennials, trees, and shrubs. On top of that they have done educational presentations at the Sustainability Project’s Seed Celebration on the importance of planting native plants and removing exotic invasives.

In 2012 Sang started a contract with NRCS to put up a high tunnel to extend the season for vegetable production and to improve and monitor her soil quality by doing Cornell soil health assessments during her first and third years of growing in the tunnel. Heidi Konesko, the NRCS Soil Conservationist that worked with Sang shared that “she is knowledgeable about growing organically and has a strong commitment to produce healthy food for her community.” Sang worked closely with Dee Denehy and six neighbors on a community garden that later evolved into a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) garden. During the time of doing their CSA they would donate hundreds of pounds of food each year to the Community Kitch-



en. Sang now volunteers at the Cheshire Fair Farm to grow and harvest food directly for the Community Kitchen.

“Supporting local businesses or growing and making our own food is very important to us,” shared Sang. She does a lot of food preservation; they even built a solar food dryer from wood from the property and an impressive root cellar to store their harvest. Chip and Sang have 100 taps and make maple syrup as a community project. Beyond their own agricultural endeavors they provide land for Vera Flora Farm, a family owned organic cut flower farm, to grow on their property. They also have a strong commitment to renewable energy and being as self-sufficient as they can. They have installed a solar system to power the majority of electricity used in their home. Their stewardship doesn’t stop with their property boundaries. Chip is also the Secretary for the Gilsum Conservation Commission and Sang has been on the Brookfield NH Conservation Commission and the Moose Mountain Regional Greenway Board in the past.

Sarah Barkhouse, co-owner of Vera Flora Farm and neighbor of Chip and Sang shared "we feel incredibly lucky to have Chip Chapman and Sang Curtis as our neighbors. All the residents in the neighborhood really cherish how special the land in The Hollow is, but Chip and Sang not only enjoy the beauty and the peace of it, but have knowledge and plans that they put into action to steward their portion of this



place. Whether through careful forest planning and management, cultivating a sugar bush, reviving old pasture for to grow food, or encouraging native plant species, I feel assured that they are making choices that are positively impacting their land and the land surrounding our home. Besides this, they truly value collaboration- sharing growing space with neighbors and young start-ups, sharing equipment, knowledge and resources. I couldn't say enough about Chip and Sang. They are some of the most kind, steadfast, helpful people we have ever had the pleasure of knowing.”

Chip and Sang have a deep commitment to the health and sustainability of their property, the Hammond Hollow Community and beyond. They represent the stewardship that will ensure a healthy future for the natural resources of our region. It is with great honor that the Cheshire County Conservation District presents Chip Chapman and Sang Curtis with the 2016 Cooperator of the Year Award.