

2019 Cooperator of the Year

Mary Ballou of Swanzey, 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 Mary Ballou of Swanzey, NH as our 2019 Cooperator of the Year.

Mary Ballou is the owner and steward of Ballou Farm, a twenty eight acre property in Swanzey NH. The farm includes 1,500 feet of frontage on the Ashuelot River and 13 acres of floodplains, wetlands and river oxbows. Her land offers critical habitat for wildlife and these natural features play an important role in maintaining and improving water quality and managing floods.

In 2016 Mary chose to put a conservation easement on the Ballou Farm protecting



Cooperator of the Year continued

it's valuable natural resources for future generations. She worked with the Swanze Conservation Commission, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), and the Monadnock Conservancy to bring this protection to her land. The agreement prevents the property from ever being developed, but allows farming, forestry and recreation to continue. This land has an agricultural history, it was originally a working farm of the Adams family, then had row crops being grown by the Barrett family in past years, and currently Mike Johnson hays the fields.

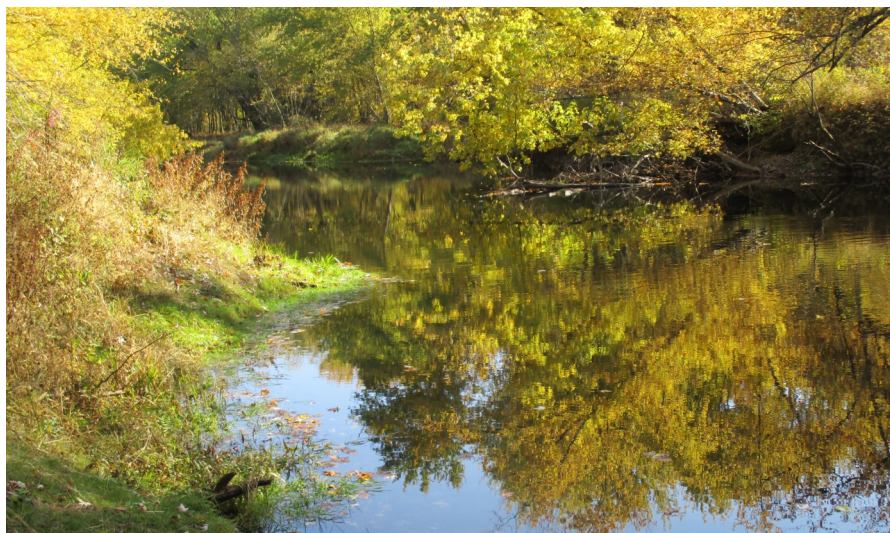
"This type of property speaks to the region's rural character with its scenic beauty, farming heritage and open views down to the river that people can enjoy from the rail trail," said Stacy Cibula, Deputy Director for the Monadnock Conservancy. "Swanzy is known for its farming and this preserves that legacy," she added.

Mary Ballou was born and raised in Keene, NH. Many generations of her family have called the Monadnock Region their home. Seven Ballou brothers came to America and eventually settled in Richmond, NH; which at one time was even referred to as "Ballou City." Mary purchased her farm in Swanzy from Ruth Adams in the late 1980s so she could have some land of her own to explore and enjoy. Mary is a Psychologist with a depth of

experience as an educator, therapist, and writer. She is recently retired with an impressive career that included 34 years as a professor in the Department of Counseling and Applied Psychology at Northeastern University. She has developed a feminist ecological model and has authored or co-authored nine books, nineteen book chapters, over thirty peer-reviewed articles, and three manuals. Today she maintains a private therapy practice in Swanzy NH.

Her conceptual research and life's work has relevance to her commitment to the land. She appreciates nature, the aesthetic beauty of her property, and understands there is a balance between private enjoyment and other uses and benefits. Mary had a strong desire to do her part to protect the valuable resources of our region. As she shared





“it is not enough to think about it, but you have to do something about it.” She was committed to not seeing her land developed but instead strongly values and wants to see compatible uses of the land. This commitment led her to the protection of the farmland and restoration of the critical wildlife habitat on her property. “Research and restoration is incredibly important particularly in this era of climate change. To do a little bit about it is what it’s all about” shared Mary.

Native floodplain forest species were planted and invasive plants were controlled as the primary focus of the restoration. In total over 3,000 native trees and shrubs were planted on 13 acres as a riparian forest buffer at the Ballou Farm. This work has made the habitat more resilient, less prone to erosion and better able to buffer against future flooding. While the property’s lower flood-prone field were restored to floodplain forest, the upland fields (11

acres) continue to be hayed. Floodplain habitat restoration on the property was planned and funded by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

Wendy Ward, the lead NRCS Conservation Planner for her property shared that “Mary was committed to the restoration and had complete trust in the partnership and expertise of NRCS and TNC to develop an ecologically sound plan. She even agreed to have her ornamental trees in her yard removed when she learned they were non-native invasives and threatening the health of the floodplain habitat. Her dedication to the restoration, and willingness to change her pastoral landscape back to a natural woodlands is a rare find.” It is with great honor that the Cheshire County Conservation District presents Mary Ballou with the 2019 Cooperator of the Year Award. Congratulations Mary!