

2016 TREE FARMER OF THE YEAR

ARTICLE PROVIDED BY: CHRISTINA ANDERSON, TREE FARMER
NOMINATED BY: SHANNON GANN, TN DIVISION OF FORESTRY

TREE FARMERS CHRIS & CHRISTINA ANDERSON, RHEA CO.

Since the original purchase in 1995 of 147 acres, Chris Anderson has vigilantly managed the tree farm and protected the family's land from boundary disputes, trespassing, poaching day and night, threats, and arson. The land is in Rhea County on the north end of Walden's Ridge which sits on the eastern ridge of the Cumberland Plateau. We share a border with Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation Natural Areas, encompassing Stinging Fork, Soak Creek, and Piney Falls, with the Cumberland Trail running through the heart of these natural areas.

The pine beetle devastation of 2000 caused Chris to seek the advice of our area forester Shannon Gann. She entered him into the Forest Stewardship Program and first stewardship management plan; to achieve the goals of a healthy sustainable forest - future woodland products and improve the habitat for wildlife. During the time of burning the infested logs, a ¼ acre pond was built which Chris stocked with catfish, bream, and bass. Today the pond is home to nesting wood ducks, frogs, bats, and a blue heron. The birds have brought in cattails and other pond grasses that make it a serene wildlife place. Our pups, Timber and Maple, keep it well aerated. In 2003 Chris replanted 10 acres of loblolly pine, with only a hand tool, an ATV, a lot of grit, and his late 4 legged pal Mako. Continuing each year to date, he has hand planted 1500-5000 seedlings annually of hardwood and pine mixes. In 2006 his land management met the standards for certification of Forest Stewardship and he also married his wife and tree farm partner Christina.

In 2007 – 2008 a total of 136 acres of old growth hardwood and pine were timbered and sold. Some tracts were clear cut, some thinned, and others cut to create oak savannahs; creating an old and new growth forest. In 2011 a total of 60 acres were replanted in shortleaf, loblolly, and yellow poplar using a planting crew. The same year, Chris hand planted an additional 3800+ hardwood and shortleaf pine seedlings.

He diligently manages the regeneration primarily through hand plantings, but also employs other methods such as crop tree release, bush hogging, invasive controls, and prescribed burns as he develops the forest back to its natural setting. These practices have allowed the big bluestem grasses and other wild flowers to naturally occur. Along ravines and wet areas, riparian buffers have been developed in accordance with state Best Management Practices. Four areas have been developed in wildlife food plots: two of them each consisting of 2 acres in strip rows with fruit and mass trees bordering it, inclusive of the American chestnut tree. The third plot is a hub-and-spoke design consisting of 3-3.5 acres inside a stand of pine and hardwood mix. The fourth plot, totaling around 16 acres, was an abandoned field converted into warm and cool season grasses with a ¼ acre pond in the middle.

In 2012 Shannon announced to us that our sustainable forest man-

agement met the standards to become a certified American Tree Farm. Throughout the years additional properties had been acquired, and in 2013 the 232 total acres had been put into a trust.

Chris and Christina hosted the Tennessee Hemlock Conservation Partnership in 2015 to hold a HWA landowner workshop for the public. This was the first time ever done on private property.

After watching an AFF webinar on the Monarch butterfly, we received a grant in 2016 to plant 1,000 milkweeds throughout 20 acres in a natural wild setting. Today we are one of over 14,000 certified Monarch Watch Waystations.

With the help of our current forester Bryan Duggan we received the D'Addario Play. Plant. Preserve. Grant Program in 2015 and 2016, planting a total of 2700 seedlings.

We are especially thankful to the East Tennessee Nursery in Delano for their high quality seedlings and friendly staff. Thanks to our foresters who have been a valuable resource in managing our properties' forest health, state forestry fire crew for prescribed burns, and the TDEC personnel that oversee our bordering Natural Areas who have helped us with this endeavor.

Our land is truly an enjoyment for the personal use of hunting, hiking, watching wildlife, and the satisfaction of ecological stewardship. We share our love of stewardship and ongoing projects with others through our website, www.crcstewardshipridge.org, and social media channels on Facebook. We always welcome the community and abroad to visit our active American Tree Farm and Forest Stewardship.



Christina and Chris Anderson

