

BERKSHIRE NATURAL RESOURCES COUNCIL

Spring 2020

LANDKEEPERS REPORT

BNRC ♥ dogs!

Inspiring the next generation of conservationists

News about your favorite trail

Finishing the job at Steadman Pond

BNRC and COVID-19

LANDKEEPERS REPORT

Spring 2020

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BERKSHIRE
Natural Resources Council

THE LANDKEEPERS

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BNRC President Jenny Hansell walks the trails with her dog Hazel.

PHOTO: BNRC STAFF

SHARING YOUR LOVE OF NATURE

When my daughters were toddlers, our family lived on an Audubon sanctuary in Connecticut. Just outside our door were over a thousand acres of protected land, both Audubon and state forest.

For a person who'd spent most of her life in one big city or another, my daily encounters with nature were thrilling and sometimes challenging. The woodchucks ate my garden. My neighbor's chickens laid eggs next to my porch stairs. The flying squirrels that mostly lived in the attic sometimes took up residence in the closet, the woodstove, or under the bed.

My children had experiences I could only dream about as a child: daily walks on the trail around the pond, where we could collect rocks and leaves, spot lizards and birds, and watch the beavers slap the water with their big flat tails.

Our nature sanctuary days are in the past: my daughters both attend college in cities now. But I have to believe that a love of nature is instilled in them for a lifetime.

These days most of my walks in nature are on BNRC trails with my dog, Hazel. If I get too deep into my own thoughts and forget to appreciate my surroundings, she reminds me. She takes her time, examining each stone and leaf, forcing me to slow down too.

Your dogs are always welcome on BNRC trails, but as you'll read on page 8, we ask you to keep them under your control at all times and on leash if town regulations require it.

See you on the trail!

—Jenny Hansell
President

BNRC and COVID-19—We had just about finished this issue when the COVID-19 crisis really hit close to home. We hope you'll take time during these days of extra care and anxiety to walk outside—our trails are open and free of charge. Put a little distance between yourself and other people, and enjoy the peace in the woods. An hour or two away from the news cycle will do your body and soul a lot of good. Our staff is mostly working from home but responding to emails and voicemail, so stay in touch!

EXTENDING WELCOME: *CONNECTING TO THE LAND*

A major BNRC initiative to expand outdoor access and public health in the Berkshires

Who first took you outside to explore nature? An easy, safe, welcoming introduction to natural places by a parent, friend or experienced mentor is frequently how people first encounter the outdoors and become comfortable there.

But what if you don't happen to know someone like that? What if you lived your entire life in a city? What if you don't have a vehicle, or drive? Where would you go to experience nature? How would you start?

You might have other questions too: What should you take with you? How could you get that gear? And what if it was too expensive?

Finding answers to these questions is at the heart of *Connecting to the Land*, a new BNRC outreach initiative to make it possible for anyone to find simple ways to get outside. It's all about supporting personal health, love of land, and community wellness.

BNRC's recent collaborations with community-serving organizations such as Living In Recovery, the Roots Teen Center, and the Pittsfield Athenaeum showed that many people long to spend time outside and reap the benefits. But a lack of transportation, or unfamiliarity with where to go and what to bring, prevents them from doing so.

Connecting to the Land helps Berkshire residents overcome these barriers and experience the outdoors in ways that before seemed impossible.

BNRC's Library in the Wilderness has already provided more than 50 families in Pittsfield and North Adams with the gear and maps needed to take that first excursion. That program continues—the backpacks can be checked out at any time.

In collaboration with our new community partners, free guided

walks and hikes led by BNRC staff, volunteers, and hired experts will feature prominently in this year's program, with transportation provided when necessary.

The walks will be educational and fun, designed to build knowledge of and appreciation for the natural landscape in the Berkshires, encourage a relationship to the land and its care, and increase access to and awareness of the health benefits of being outdoors.

BNRC plans to offer 32 hikes in 2020. Of these, 20 outings will be designed specifically for those of us who are healing and recovering from addiction.

Connecting to the Land has generously been funded by the Robbins-de Beaumont Foundation, Ginny Akabane, the Dr. Robert C. & Tina Sohn Foundation, and Berkshire Bank. Your donations to BNRC also contribute to making this important initiative possible. 🌲



PHOTO: GABRIELLE K. MURPHY

For more information, contact Mariah Auman, BNRC's Volunteer and Outreach Coordinator, at mauman@bnrc.org.

NEW BOARD MEMBERS



Steve Alsdorf is a biker, hiker, trail runner, and skier. A family physician at Community Health Programs in Great Barrington, he thinks keeping people well includes working to care for the environment in which we live. Steve is excited to work on BNRC's High Road—to promote thoughtful economic development in the Berkshires. He also looks forward to helping with BNRC's new series of outings designed specifically for those of us healing from addiction.



Jeff Belair grew up in the Berkshires. Through scouting, he hiked, backpacked, camped, skied, and really did anything that could be done outdoors, nearly every month, from age 10 until it was time to leave home for college. He appreciates all the work done by BNRC supporters to conserve land, care for it, and monitor it as a way of making and keeping the Berkshires special. Jeff is a CPA and partner with Smith, Watson & Company, LLP based in Pittsfield. His experience working with clients to develop their estate plans, and planning with conservation restrictions from a tax perspective, will be a great help to BNRC.



Pittsfield native **Carrie Holland** is Managing Director at Mill Town and spends much of her energy leading the company's broad community development projects. Having grown up hiking, biking, skiing, skating, swimming, boating, playing sports, and working outside, Carrie and her husband Sam were eager to leave the city and return to their hometown in the Berkshires to be closer to nature once again. Having developed an appetite for distance hikes like Nepal's 140-mile Annapurna Circuit and the 110-mile Tour du Mont Blanc, Carrie is excited to support BNRC's vision of completing The High Road and other projects to further develop the outdoor recreation economy of the Berkshires.



Wendy Linscott, of the Great Barrington law firm of Lamme and Linscott, has lived nearly her entire life in the Berkshires. She served previously on BNRC's Board of Directors, and is returning for more fun. With BNRC and the Egremont Land Trust, Wendy helped conserve the Baldwin Hill working farm district and its spectacular 360-degree views of the southern Berkshire mountains. Wendy brings with her that important BNRC experience and insight, as well as her expertise as a lawyer who works with a number of area land trusts and whose specialties are real estate and estate planning.

MAKE THIS THE YEAR YOU VOLUNTEER WITH BNRC

BNRC loves its volunteers! In 2019, 77 people logged more than 700 volunteer hours, submitted 70+ trail reports, and scoped out nearly 100 miles of roads and trails around Berkshire County for possible High Road routes. BNRC's volunteers help do what needs to get done.

If you're curious about volunteering, come to one of our monthly volunteer orientations, held on the first Tuesday of each month from 4:00 pm – 5:00 pm at our office on Park Square in Pittsfield. You'll get an overview of the work BNRC does and what volunteer opportunities are available. There will be time to discuss each person's interests and goals.

The 2020 season will bring opportunities for trail maintenance, trail building, invasive species removal, and so much more! Come learn about this fellowship of happy helpers, and feel the love!

RSVPs are required to Mariah at mauman@bnrc.org. Please note that due to COVID-19 concerns, the April volunteer orientation is cancelled. Please contact Mariah about the next one. 🍷



Your help on the trails keeps them open and beautiful for everyone—thank you, volunteers!



CONVENING LEADERS AND LANDOWNERS TO EXPAND GRASSROOTS CONSERVATION IN THE BERKSHIRES

BNRC brings together local land trusts, town and municipal groups, and the public


Berkshire Natural Resources Council hosted a series of networking events for municipal groups and local land trusts throughout Berkshire County this past February. These gatherings enabled town planners, land trust leaders, and many others to think—and learn—together to create opportunities for landowners to make conservation a part of their estate plans.

The gatherings were held across the county, in North Adams, Pittsfield, and Great Barrington. In total, the meetings gathered 65



people with representatives from town planning boards, conservation commissions, land trusts and passionate community members.

BNRC was eager to convene regional leaders and work with partners to share tools and expertise to better prepare them for conversations with landowners in their towns. Over half of the forests in Massachusetts are in private ownership and have little protection from future development. The conversations with landowners laid the foundation to protect these lands in perpetuity.

Visit bnrc.org/learn to find a list of conservation networking resources! 



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GETTING DIRTY: NEW TRAIL WORK SEASON BEGINS

BNRC staff and volunteers make sure your trails are safe and environmentally sustainable

Steven's Glen (West Stockbridge):

BNRC is working to improve the Steven's Glen loop by replacing two bridges that have become undermined by the dynamic nature of the stream they cross. Peter S. Jensen & Associates, in cooperation with the BNRC trail crew, will remove the failing bridges and relocate a single crossing in a more secure location between them.



This drop-off will be regraded this spring so your walk down the Old Mill Trail will be smoother. A full overhaul to ensure the trail is completely accessible should be complete within a year.

Old Mill Trail (Dalton):

The trail crew will be working this spring to restore a smooth transition from the trail surface onto the three

bridges along the accessible portion of the Old Mill Trail. Over time the lip from the gravel onto the bridge decking has increased beyond the U.S. Forest Service's acceptable guidelines for accessible trails. The trail crew will also reset the retaining structures along the approach to each bridge.

Later in the season or early next year we will undertake a larger maintenance project for Old Mill Trail by rebuilding and expanding the end of the accessible portion of the trail. Seating will be added to create a spot to stop and rest. Portions of the gravel tread will be resurfaced to restore proper drainage and grade. In addition to these improvements, the parking area will be overhauled to create accessible spaces.

Parson's Marsh (Lenox):

In response to some very constructive feedback from fans of the Parson's Marsh boardwalk, three benches will be added: one at the transition from the gravel tread to the boardwalk, another at the bump-out about halfway to the overlook, and the third at the overlook itself. This seating will provide places for you to rest, read, watch wildlife, and take in the peaceful surroundings.



Volunteer Ginny Akabane helped complete the Mahanna Cobble trail. When it opens this spring, you'll be able to walk from Bousquet to George's Bench and the ridgetop with its stunning views.

Mahanna Cobble (Pittsfield):

Thanks to your generosity, the efforts of our excellent volunteers, and the dedication of seasonal trail staff, the Mahanna Cobble trail leading to George's Bench was completed last fall. New signage is in the works as well. This trail, years in construction, opens access to an astounding southerly view of Yokun Ridge, Pleasant Valley, and the southern reaches of Berkshire County all the way to Mount Everett. 🌲

PHOTOS: GABRIELLE K. MURPHY

NEW
ADDITIONS
TO OUR
ONLINE
STORE!



100% Berkshire
Baby Onesie
\$15.00



100% Berkshire Dog Bandana
\$8.00

bnrc.org/store Thank you for being a Landkeeper with BNRC. See you on the trails!



PHOTO: BNRC STAFF

Steadman Pond is a perfect place for a picnic, fishing, and canoeing, and some day, a peaceful trail walk around the perimeter

FINISHING THE JOB:

A small parcel on Steadman Pond in Monterey Completes an Important Conservation Project

Nearly twelve years ago, then-governor Deval Patrick stood on the shore of Steadman Pond in Monterey to mark and celebrate the conservation of 800 acres of forest and meadow. On that day in 2008, most of the pond's shoreline was conserved, but a key parcel was left unprotected, leaving the property vulnerable to the impacts of development.

In February 2020, BNRC purchased the remaining seven acres—a small piece by comparison, but one that means the entire shoreline of the pond, all the way around, will stay pristine forever.

"We couldn't come up with the money to buy the whole thing back then," said BNRC Director of Land Conservation Narain Schroeder, "so we left the owners, Barclay and Kerstin Hudson, with a building lot." The Hudsons, whose family had owned the property for generations, never built a home there, but if they or a future owner had done so, the character of this beautiful wilderness spot would be changed forever. Lawn chemicals could seep into the pond, or a roving housecat could decimate the populations of birds and other wildlife.

"I've been worried about that piece ever since we left it," Schroeder says, "and when I saw that we might be able to qualify for Natural Resources Defense (NRD) funds, I called Barclay and made him an offer." The NRD fund was set up to help protect properties in the Housatonic River watershed affected by PCBs, and this property is within that footprint. Hudson accepted the offer, the funding was secured, and twelve years after the original celebration, conservation of Steadman Pond is complete. As with the surrounding +/- 800 acres, these seven acres will also be subject to a conservation restriction held by our partners, the Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game.

For his part, Barclay Hudson is glad to see the pond protected forever. In a recent email he noted that, "once again, BNRC has come through with a win-win project, and I am especially appreciative to you for your role in shepherding this project from beginning to end. I imagine our mother, too, is somewhere up there looking down and being very pleased with the way her purchase of Berkshire land back in the 1930s has now taken on a permanent conservation status—a peaceful oasis, for all of us."

Over the years Steadman Pond has been enjoyed by many visitors; it's a popular place to go for a swim, to fish, to hunt, to float, but there's never been an improved trail. With the acquisition of this parcel we can begin to dream of a trail that winds around the water's edge. The backside of the pond hides a scenic jumble of rock under a dense hemlock forest. Imagine the temperature drop as you enter cool shade and then wind through mossy boulders back to where you started—or perhaps, continue west and connect to Bidwell House for a High Road adventure. Steadman Pond is a hidden gem, and with this seven-acre addition, it has been preserved, forever. 🌿



BERKSHIRE

Natural Resources Council

THE LANDKEEPERS

20 Bank Row
Pittsfield MA 01201

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Non-Profit Organization

U.S. Postage

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Pittsfield, MA

Permit No. 130

BNRC ♥ DOGS

Bring your best bud along

Thank you for helping keep BNRC properties dog-friendly! Dogs are welcome on BNRC properties and trails. For safety, ecology, and harmony, please remember:

- Local leash laws prevail, and these vary from town to town. When in doubt, keep your dog on a leash. Dogs must be under the owner's control at all times.
- Leave No Trace. Please clean up your dog's waste and transport it off-site for disposal.
- Please keep your dog away from wetlands and vernal pools.
- Well-behaved dogs on leash are welcome on most of BNRC's guided hikes. However: on hikes for bird watching or animal tracking, for example, dogs would be a disruption, so please leave them home. You can always call the office at 413-499-0596 ahead of an outing if you're not sure.

Here are photos of a few of our canine friends. We'd love to see pictures of yours enjoying BNRC trails, too! You can post them on Instagram with #landkeepers and #bnrc.

