

BERKSHIRE NATURAL RESOURCES COUNCIL

Fall 2019

LANDKEEPERS

REPORT

You can...

...Improve your health

...Protect threatened species

...Help teens connect art and nature



LANDKEEPERS REPORT

Fall 2019

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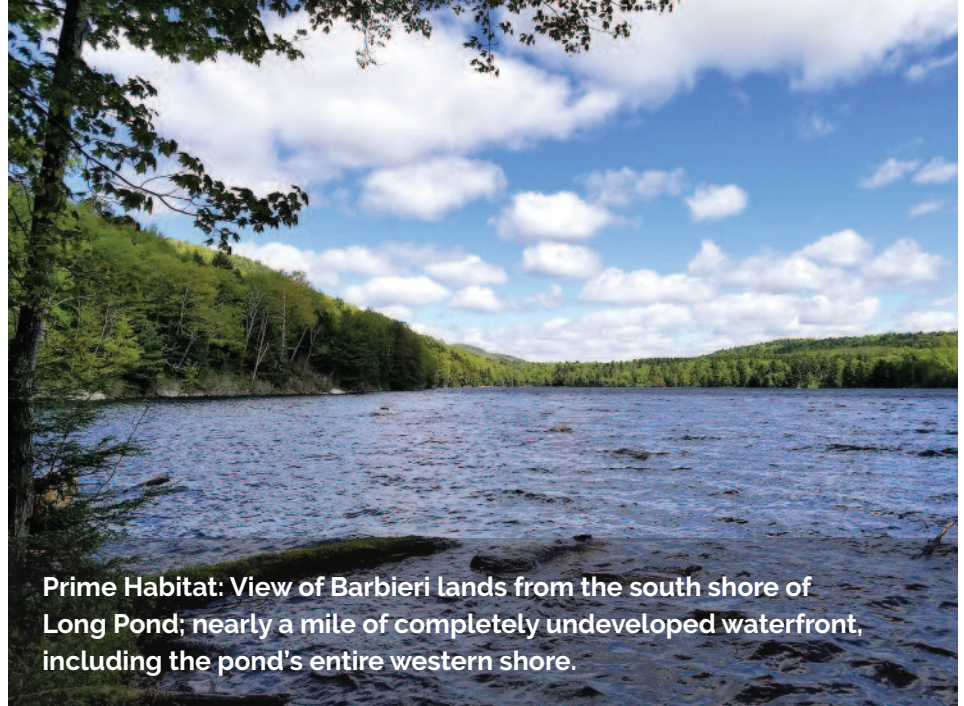


BERKSHIRE
Natural Resources Council

THE LANDKEEPERS

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Prime Habitat: View of Barbieri lands from the south shore of Long Pond; nearly a mile of completely undeveloped waterfront, including the pond's entire western shore.

ALL THE RIGHT REASONS

Let's seize this opportunity together!

If you wander through the town of Housatonic, you may recognize one of the village's repurposed mill buildings as the old Barbieri Lumber Company headquarters. The late Jim Barbieri, one of the company's former owners, is remembered fondly for his conscientious business manner, and as an influential, conservation-minded forester.

The woods Jim walked daily stand on land first acquired by Jim's father Lawrence, and are now owned by Jim's nephews. These woods, leading up to spectacular views from the top, also keep hold on the entire western shore of Long Pond.

Sign of bear, bobcat, and deer is abundant. Jim's woods are also home to several species under threat in Massachusetts—wood turtle, Jefferson salamander, and several plants. This rich habitat and secluded escape is an essential part of a greenway that spans from the Williams River to Route 22.

In light of this local history and important habitat, I'm thrilled we

have an opportunity to permanently protect these +/- 242 acres. BNRC has an option to purchase this property, so it can become a conservation reserve in perpetuity. A number of Alford and Great Barrington residents, and the Alford Land Trust, have helped raise much of the \$500,000 needed for acquisition. At this writing, we have just \$23,000 left to raise before the option to purchase expires on December 31, 2019.

If we pull this off together, BNRC will open a loop path around these splendid woods with preservation of the high-value habitat in mind. If you'd like to help save the Barbieri woods, the Alford Valley view, and the pristine shores of Long Pond, please be in touch with Narian Schroeder, nshroeder@bnrc.org, or jot "Barbieri" on your gift.

Thank you!

— Jenny Hansell
President



Finding peace, relaxation, and maybe a fish or two.

EMBRACING THE HEALING POWER OF NATURE

Berkshire healthcare providers partner to create a connection to the land

If you found a way to get more and better sleep, reduce your blood pressure, improve your fitness, and feel less stressed, for free and with no negative side effects, wouldn't you jump on it?

A walk in the woods has just such benefits, and many Berkshire health and wellness providers are prescribing the nature cure for their clients.

Eric Krawczyk, a licensed mental health counselor, leads "Hike with Healers" and brings his private clients to various trails around the Berkshires, including Parsons Marsh, where he sometimes parks his mobile office. "My clients come in with some kind of mood difficulty or stressor that may be overwhelming, or interfere with relationships, work or their general happiness," he says. Connecting with nature, Eric says, can

"As we work to heal the earth,
the earth heals us."

—Robin Wall Kimmerer
Braiding Sweetgrass

help quiet the mind, activate the senses, and calm the nervous system.

"There's always a bit of surprise and fun on a nature walk," he adds—"you never know if you're going to see a frog, bird or even an interesting insect." A walk outdoors can be a more playful way to provide counseling, less intimidating for people who are mistrustful of therapy, and safe for people dealing with trauma or grief.

Sleep specialist Ed O'Malley's office is across the street from

BNRC's Housatonic Flats reserve in Great Barrington, and he encourages clients who are struggling with sleep disorders to walk there. "Europeans have been prescribing nature for years. It's a physical, mental and spiritual connection."

Some of his older clients remember what it was like when they were young and could just sit and watch a bee. "It clears the cobwebs," Ed says, "and helps them de-stress, fall asleep more easily, and stay asleep longer."

Ed offers some advice for people who aren't comfortable walking in nature. "Don't expect nature to conform to you," he says. "Adjust. Don't go out at dawn and dusk if you are afraid of bugs."

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"I cannot endure to waste anything so precious as autumnal sunshine by staying the house."

—Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The American Notebooks*

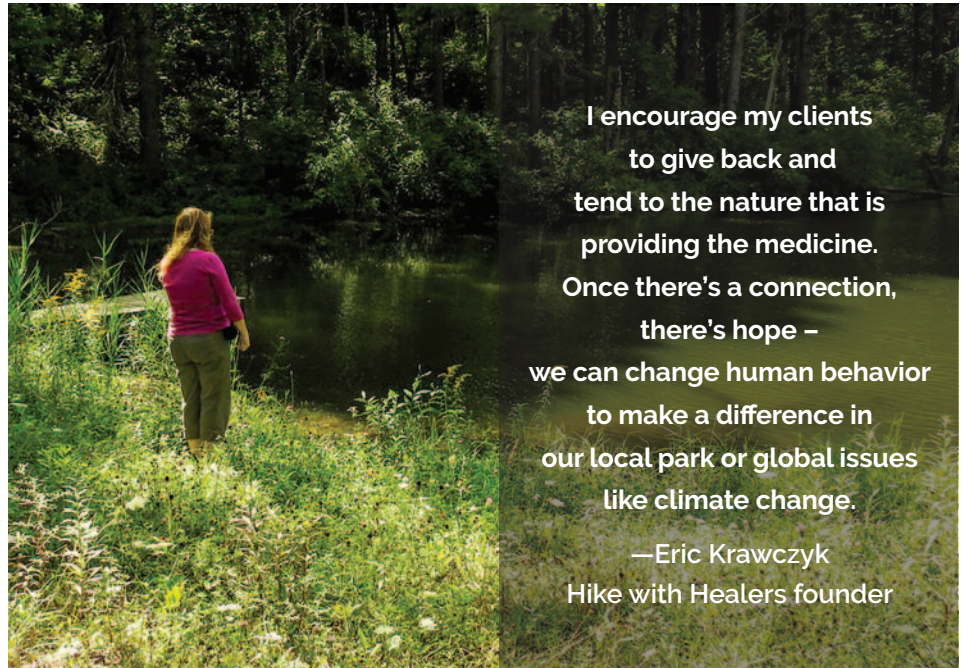
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"There is no bad weather, only bad clothing choices," Ed adds.

Fuel your body and your brain

After volunteering on a BNRC project, Community Health Program Nutritionist Ashli Minor reached out to us with an offer to co-lead walks to promote the benefits of fresh air and sunlight. The CHP clinic in Great Barrington is next to a loop trail that goes to Fountain Pond and Threemile Hill.

"There is amazing research that shows that ten minutes of walking after a meal significantly reduces blood sugar," Ashli says. "I don't talk about diet and exercise, I talk about nutrition and activity—positivity, not deprivation. I encourage what will fuel your body and your brain, help your hormones and thyroid and sleep,



I encourage my clients
to give back and
tend to the nature that is
providing the medicine.
Once there's a connection,
there's hope –
we can change human behavior
to make a difference in
our local park or global issues
like climate change.

—Eric Krawczyk
Hike with Healers founder

reduce cortisol levels—your physical and psychological well-being."

Ashli has helped lead 4 hikes from April through August, with people of all ages and abilities. "Kids are so inquisitive," she adds. "They

are excited to see a butterfly or follow a grasshopper. People find social connection too—they feel like they are part of the community."

"I also work with students on the autism spectrum," she says. "When

BNRC PARTNERS WITH THE LIVING IN RECOVERY CENTER

Supporting physical, mental and spiritual health

One of the greatest barriers to people getting out into nature is transportation, or the lack of it. This summer BNRC, in partnership with the Berkshire Athenaeum, piloted a series of "transportation hikes"—bus trips from Pittsfield to several of our nearby trails. With funding from the Crane Family Fund at the Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation, the hikes began in July and were quickly embraced by staff at the Living in Recovery center, a peer-led organization for people in recovery from addiction.

Over 20 people from the center attended each of the first two

hikes, so BNRC staffers Mariah Auman and Mackenzie Greer met with Living in Recovery staff to envision a bigger program.

"It's very difficult for people, especially early in recovery," said Katrina Brown, Living in Recovery's Volunteer Coordinator. "They may have no money, no vehicle, no way to get out of the city. Addiction is a multi-faceted disease, and recovery is physical, spiritual and mental. The first thing is regaining physical health, and hiking supports that. Once they start feeling better, being in nature boosts the mental and spiritual health too,

addressing the other issues they may have, like depression and anxiety."

Working with Living in Recovery Program Director Joseph Buyse, the team planned a 20-mile hike series over the next ten months. A bus will pick up center clients, and there will be snacks and incentives like hiking socks and field guides. Guest leaders will offer workshops in meditation, art, birds, wildflowers and other topics according to the interests of participants. The total cost of the program is about \$15,000, and BNRC is seeking grants and donations to cover



Parson's Marsh is the perfect spot to de-stress and reconnect to nature, friends, and ourselves.

I meet with them we go outside and walk on the trail and talk. It's a game changer. The kids feel better, more confident, they have better energy. They smile more and talk more."

As winter comes, Ashli encourages people to rechannel their thoughts and habits. "Instead of sitting in the house eating too much because I'm lonely or bored or anxious, I'm going to go for a walk

with people. I'll feel refreshed, and have more energy."

A meditative forest walk

Canyon Ranch guests are amazed by the beauty of BNRC properties like Basin Pond and the Brothers Trail in Lenox, says Leah Larmon, Manager of Outdoor Sports at the spa. "Many of our visitors are city-bound, a little afraid of nature. We help them realize that getting some fresh air and greenery helps them de-stress." Her staff is certified in Shinrin Yoku, or forest bathing. "It's a meditative forest walk, getting people out in the woods to breathe in the air. It's proven to relieve stress and anxiety," she explains.

"We are nature," Ed O'Malley says. "Not separate from it. We've lost the connection to ourselves."

A walk in the woods may be all we need to find ourselves again. 🌿



the costs.

Brown sees the benefit of the social connection of a group hike, too. "Addiction is so isolating," she explains. "Getting outside with other people, building new,

positive habits—the clients of the center are usually inside, sitting in meetings all day, so they really appreciate getting out into the fresh air and doing something different."



Exploring nature promotes a sense of wonder and well-being and combats social isolation.

To support the Living in Recovery Nature Partnership, contact Rich Montone at rmontone@bnrc.org.



ArtDoors and BNRC each gain a great deal from collaboration—including refreshed paths at the Hoosac Range in North Adams and new trail at The Boulders in Dalton/Lanesborough/Pittsfield.



ARTDOORS AND BNRC TEAM UP FOR UNFORGETTABLE OUTINGS

North Adams teen group digs into art and conservation

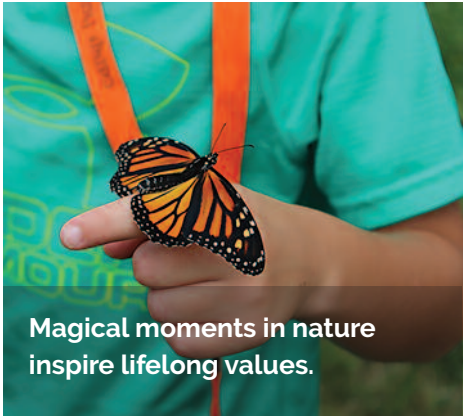
Ask someone why they care about conservation and they will likely tell you a story about their childhood—a family camping trip, hunting with a grandparent, scouting, an orienteering class at school.

Conservation values arise from early-life experiences like these. Yet only some of us happen to wander into nature as we grow up.

This year, BNRC staff has been working with ArtDoors, a youth organization connected to the ROOTS Center and UNiTY at the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition in North Adams. The collaboration is part of BNRC's interest in providing wide access to outdoor experiences, in this case for teenagers, to pay forward the spirit and smarts needed to inspire the next generation to care about—and for—the land.

By alternating between studio art and outdoor education sessions, ArtDoors introduces young people to the idea that the natural and artistic worlds are profoundly connected. This provides a number of ArtDoors teens with their first experiences in nature, at a formative time in life.

"I wanted more creative opportunities for young people; to show them the amazing things that are in this community and explore how that is influenced by nature."
—Jessica Sweeney
ArtDoors co-founder



Magical moments in nature inspire lifelong values.

In recent weeks, the ArtDoors team visited BNRC's Hoosac Range trail in North Adams. There, BNRC's Mariah Auman discussed outdoor safety with the group and demonstrated the basics of trail building and trail maintenance. Then the


ArtDoors crew got busy trimming the entire corridor of the well-loved trail to Sunset Rock.

Building new trail, eating wild blueberries

Another outing brought ArtDoors to The Boulders in Dalton and Pittsfield, where the group hopped into a soil pit with BNRC's Josh Hopmans and Tyler Fogg, and built new trail in the popular reserve. For many of the teens, it was their first time being part of actual trail creation, rather than trail maintenance.

The teens also receive a stipend for their work.

"It takes longer than usual to hike a trail with the ArtDoors group," says Mariah, "because they are eating wild berries and asking questions along the way. It's the best. We're so glad for their help."

Surely the opportunity to be afield with BNRC staff will make a lasting difference in the lives of these teens, and, we think, on the future of both art and conservation in the Berkshires. 



Through the APR Program, BNRC helped secure \$1.6 million in state funding to protect this farmland.

SHEFFIELD FARMLAND PROTECTED

APR ensures land will keep growing forever

In October of 2015 BNRC received a question from Morven Allen, a Sheffield dairy farmer: Can BNRC help preserve Windy Hill Farm? Allen, who owns the Balsam Hill farm, was also managing 174 acres owned by Warren Wilcox, and hoped to purchase the land and keep it in agriculture. But he needed BNRC's help shepherding the APR through the State's process.



Warren Wilcox (l), and Morven Allen walk the land they protected together

The Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) Program is administered by the Commonwealth's Department of Agricultural Resources. In essence, the State buys the development rights from farmers, thereby protecting farmland from development and reducing the cost of good land for farmers. BNRC assists farmers with mapping areas that should be included/excluded from the APR, and if necessary, assists with a first appraisal to get a handle on real property values.

Wilcox grew up in Connecticut working on a farm in Middlefield called Lyman Orchards. Much of it is now a golf course and, as Warren said, "a golf course and cows don't go together." After leaving Lyman Orchards in the 1960s, Warren began looking for his own place. In Sheffield he found Windy Hill Farm (not to be confused with the nursery and orchard of the same name in Great Barrington), and after 50 years of hard work, he was not interested in seeing it bulldozed into house lots.

Warren's APR preserves 174 acres of prime farmland, which will be used to hold and graze the calves from Morven's dairy farm. Also protected are the sweeping views of the Taconic Range from Hulett Hill Road. Once the APR was completed, Warren sold the land to Morven, who also farms adjacent fields in BNRC's Suter Reserve, comprising 152 acres of conserved fields and forest.

Sharing some of his farm's history, Warren said of one of his large fields had originally been divided into 3 smaller ones. "I moved all the stone and hedgerows to make it a single workable field," he remembered.

Asked what he was going to do now that his farm is sold, he said he'd take it easy. "Ever hear of a farmer taking it easy?" he added. "I never did." Knowing his beloved farmland is protected forever, Warren Wilcox can definitely put his feet up and relax! 🐾



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YOU'VE HELPED THE CAUSE OF LAND CONSERVATION!

Some recent BNRC accomplishments:



The Berkshire Farm acquisition, long in the works, closed in June, adding 342 acres to the Hollow Fields reserve in Richmond, preserving a **key future High Road connection**.

The Backpack Program, a huge success at the Berkshire Athenaeum in Pittsfield, is expanding to North Adams library, **where five "Nature Discovery Backpacks" will be equipped with all the gear** to have a great outing in nature. The program will launch in the fall with a hike on BNRC's Hoosac Range trail.

A new parking area and split rail fence were recently installed at BNRC's new Thomas & Palmer Brook reserve on Route 23 in Great Barrington, making it **easy to enjoy this lovely, easy trail** through a meadow and past an old apple orchard overlooking a vast wetland.

BNRC is moving forward to **protect all remaining unconserved land around Steadman Pond** in Monterey and Tyringham, thanks to a \$145,000 grant from the Housatonic River Natural Resource Defense Fund. BNRC will soon own the entire pond, enabling us to eventually put a trail around it for all to enjoy.

Thank you for making all this happen!

"I'm so glad I live in a world where there are Octobers."

—LM Montgomery, *Anne of Green Gables*