



# Field Notes

Newsletter of the Great Barrington Land Conservancy

Fall/Winter 2008

## Great Barrington Trails and Greenways

*Dale Abrams*

Just over one year ago, Great Barrington Land Conservancy applied for assistance under the National Park Service's Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program to begin a new project called Great Barrington Trails and Greenways. This project received one of only three grants awarded throughout New England during this cycle. While the program doesn't provide direct funding, it has offered much needed technical support, helped build a trails coalition, and opened doors to new funding sources.

Along with lead partner Alliance for a Healthy Great Barrington, GBLC set out to form a coalition of groups working on behalf of trails, community health, and local history. Remarkably, this group has grown to include over 18 collaborating partners representing local, regional, and national organizations and governments (Appalachian Trail Conservancy, Berkshire Natural Resource Council, Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, The Trustees of Reservations, Upper Housatonic Valley National Heritage Area, to name just a few). Under the guidance of co-chairs, Christine Ward and Deb Philips, this group has blazed new trails both figuratively and literally.

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*GBLC is dedicated to preserving and enhancing the community's natural resources and distinctive character. Through promotion and fund-raising endeavors, GBLC enables the dedication of open space to agricultural, recreational and scenic purposes through acquisitions, conservation easement and agricultural preservation restrictions.*



*GB Trails partners gathered at Berkshire South Regional Community Center*

Together the partners developed a new map called the Great Barrington Trails and Greenways vision map that combines all existing hiking trails, walking and biking and boating routes along with proposed trails representing entirely new routes or links between existing trails and travel routes. The group also sponsored a diverse series of outings led by the partners under the heading GB Excursions which included historic walks, nature hikes, canoe trips, and even snorkeling. A new website has been created to link the partners and provide an easy to access portal for regional trails information and upcoming events.

GBLC recently received notice that the National Park Service assistance will be renewed for a second year. Our efforts will focus on establishing one or more in-town kiosks for trails information, continuing the GB Excursions programs, and sharing our model with other communities in Berkshire County. GB Trails partners are also excited to be working with the Appalachian Trail Conservancy in planning a series of 2009 spring and summer events which will feature Great Barrington as a pilot Appalachian Trail Community Partner. Special programs, hikes, trail work days and student and family activities will all be featured in this celebration. For more information visit: [www.gbtrails.org](http://www.gbtrails.org)

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# River Walk Annual Update

*Rachel Fletcher*

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This has been a most productive work season. Interns Ryan Caruso, Dan Hassett and Hilary Kirchner from BCC, Will Strayer from Bard College at Simon's Rock, and Jenna Turner from University of Rhode Island, all environmental science majors, worked for River Walk through the 2008 season.

River Walk was awarded \$133,308 over four years from the Housatonic River Natural Resource Damages Fund paid by General Electric for PCB Pollution. The grant enables us to restore approximately 2.63 acres of riparian habitat, continue our invasive plant control program throughout the entire half mile of trail, propagate 7500 native plants for on-site restoration activities, apply compost tea soil amendments, perform trail way management and river bottom cleanups, upgrade River Walk's signage and trail entrance, create a River Walk brochure and newly expanded 56-page guide, offer three native/invasive plant workshops, and

monitor our native plant restoration and compost tea application efficacy for three growing seasons.

River Walk received grants of: \$3600 from Legacy Banks; \$2000 from the Town of Great Barrington; \$2000 from the Katherine L. W. and Winthrop M. Crane III Charitable Trust; \$1000 from Iredale Mineral Cosmetics; \$500 from Trinity Lutheran Church; and donations from several local foundations and businesses, including Berkshire Bank, Berkshire Corporation, Clark and Green, Country Curtains and Red Lion Inn, Crystal Essence, Gallery Eight, Pittsfield Cooperative Bank, St. James Episcopal Church, and Wheeler & Taylor.

River systems are nothing if not dynamic. Recently we learned that a 50 foot section of riverbank is in critical need of stabilization. Without this work, the riverbank will surely erode and destroy an adjacent section of River Walk trail. Steve Mack of Foresight Land Services, Gary

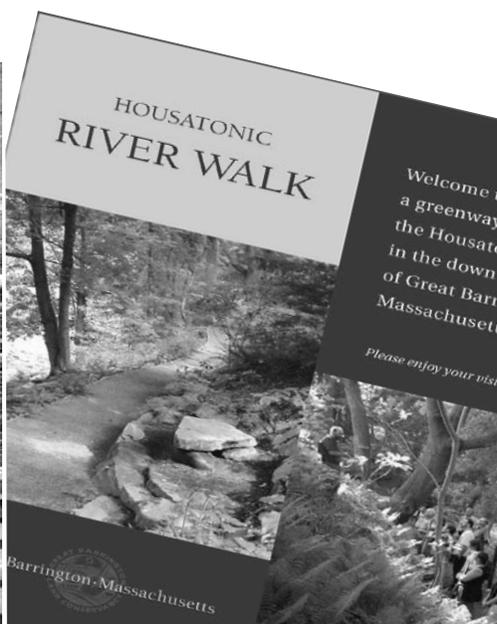
Oggiani of Great River Construction, and Jon Piasecki of Golden Bough are guiding us through the design, permitting, excavation, stabilization and native planting process, helping us to accomplish the task with bioengineering techniques and finding ways to bring down costs using interns and volunteers.

River Walk is the product of more than two thousand volunteers of all ages and walks of life. We are saddened to tell you that Comstock Small, our most valued volunteer, passed away in 2007 on October 9. Comstock worked tirelessly in the early days, devoting more than 1000 hours over nine seasons, far more than any other volunteer. Those who worked along side him rarely walk the trail without recalling his presence—hauling out rubble, laying in trail or cribbing stone, cutting bittersweet, filling gabions, always the gentleman, always with kindness and humor and the patience of a saint. The stone bench he installed along the upstream trail is now dedicated to his memory.

We look forward to another year of walking along the trail, observing new growth of our "native-native" plantings and sharing the beauty of the riverbank with the community. We are ever grateful to our donors and volunteers. Learn more at [www.gbriverwalk.org](http://www.gbriverwalk.org)



*Simon's Rock volunteers weed the river bank*



*Guides and brochures available at trailheads*



*Exotic invasive plants workshop*

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# Lake Mansfield Conservation Forest Trail Project

*Dale Abrams & Christine Ward*

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*Volunteers place bridge footings*

Just a few steps from the beach at Lake Mansfield a new trail has begun to take shape this summer. Located within the town-owned Lake Mansfield Conservation Forest, this trail connects the lake to the nearby Christian Hill Rd. and Welcome St. neighborhood and the Christian Hill Commons housing development. Funded by grants from the Department of Conservation and Recreation and the Berkshire Environmental Endowment, these accessible trails provide a much needed resource for people with physical challenges and a great place for many to connect with the natural world—families, our aging population, students, residents and visitors alike.

The conservation forest trail project is an great example of the important work that LMA continues to do on behalf of open space, recreation, and community health. Improving the trails in the conservation forest



*Locust logs are milled on site*

was long called for in the town's openspace and recreation plans. With the support of the Great Barrington Conservation Commission, LMA has initiated a major trail redesign, established a new trail route, and completed construction of a new pedestrian bridge—all accomplished through dozens of well attended volunteer work days this spring, summer, and early fall. These work days offer volunteers an opportunity to work along side master trail designer and builder Peter Jensen. The final phase of this project in 2009 will complete the surfacing of the main trail (between the lake and Christian Hill Rd.), add a new spur trail providing access to Christian Hill Commons, and create a new



*Peter Jensen directs bridge construction*

accessible trail that loops back to the lake.

This project provides a critical link in the development of a town wide trail system recently mapped out through the Great Barrington Trails and Greenways initiative by LMA and other community organizations. The conservation forest project promotes exploration of the diverse landscape features in this town property and provides a means for residents to access Lake Mansfield by bike or on foot. In addition to providing safe access to a well used town park, the project also supports community health, fitness and environmental education. To view the work in progress the trail may be accessed from the beach parking area.

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# Lake Mansfield Alliance Update: Caring for our Beautiful Lake

*Christine Ward*

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We have had a very industrious year at Lake Mansfield. Lake Mansfield Alliance (LMA) has worked to engage many in stewardship activities and the community has responded generously.

LMA and the Lake Mansfield Improvement Task Force (a town appointed group) spearheaded two important safety measures at the lake's beach and parking areas in response to community concern. A split rail fence and raised crosswalk were installed in cooperation with the Great Barrington Department



*A hard working volunteer at the Lake Clean-up*



*Proud tree planters around a new red maple donated by LMA and the GB Garden Club*

of Public Works and the Parks and Recreation Commission. Planning, fence materials and volunteer labor were provided through LMA.

The Annual Lake Clean-up was a great success again this year. More than one hundred volunteers came out for our 7<sup>th</sup> clean-up and celebration. This effort is built upon a strong tradition of stewardship involving community volunteers and supporting

businesses. It is a joyful occasion where tall and small, young and old, residents and visitors, all join together to get things done.

LMA also completed the important goal of installing recycling/trash containers that are sturdy and animal proof. The cost of these containers was shared equally by LMA and the GB Parks Commission. The beach and park

area is now fully outfitted. These containers will serve park users for years to come, providing an easy means for recycling to reduce the town's trash output.

In September, LMA members partnered with the Great Barrington Garden Club to support and host a Tree Planting and Senior Picnic Day. Together we funded the purchase of a beautiful Red Maple which will provide summer shade and fall dazzle! The delivery, planting, and soil amendments were donated by Ward's Nursery and Garden Center.

After the planting, tables were "clothed" and bedecked with flowers,



*Senior Picnic Day drew a wonderful turn out*

hot dogs grilled, and yummy entrees and deserts were assembled all in time to greet the 25 seniors from the senior center for a lovely afternoon at the lake. Grace Zbell, senior center coordinator, stayed on with seniors who were enjoying a lively bingo game after the meal. It was a pleasure to see folks have such a great time at the lake.

Thank you to everyone who helped LMA accomplish so many improvements at Lake Mansfield this year. We couldn't do this without your contributions, volunteer labor, donated materials, and presence at key town meetings. Please continue to be an active lake advocate as you remind your friends and neighbors about the importance of protecting and preserving Lake Mansfield for future generations. Learn more at [www.lakemansfield.org](http://www.lakemansfield.org)



## Friends of the Du Bois Homesite Update

*Rachel Fletcher*

The Great Barrington Land Conservancy has joined forces with a coalition of local groups known as the Friends of the Du Bois Homesite, partnering with the Du Bois Center of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst to promote the legacy of civil rights activist and Great Barrington native W. E. B. Du Bois.

The Friends' leadership represents institutions with long-standing interests in promoting the legacy of W.E.B. Du Bois in the town and region, including the 1968 Du Bois Memorial Committee, the Great Barrington Historical Society, the Clinton African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church of Great Barrington, and the Upper Housatonic Valley African American Heritage Trail. The Friends is a formally adopted project of the Great Barrington Land Conservancy, which is acting as fiscal sponsor.

The Friends' mission is to plan an appropriate memorial to Dr. Du Bois at his boyhood homesite in Great Barrington, a National Landmark property which the University administers. The Friends are partnering with the University, acting in a stewardship capacity to achieve a public memorial to this leading scholar and activist in the civil rights movement in the United States and around the world.

The first part of the restoration was accomplished this summer with University funds and includes provisions for parking, signage and a light foot trail leading to the boulder where the first dedication ceremony took place in October, 1969. Meanwhile, the Friends and University are developing an illustrated Master Plan that articulates the vision and strategies for transforming Du Bois' boyhood homesite into a regional, national, and international tourist destination. The goal is to make planning and fundraising documents available in time for the 2009 centennial celebration of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, or NAACP, which Dr. Du Bois co-founded in 1909.

For more information, contact Rachel Fletcher at 413-528-3391 or [info@DuBoisHomesite.org](mailto:info@DuBoisHomesite.org). Tax deductible donations can be made to the Friends of the Du Bois Homesite, P.O. Box 1018, Great Barrington MA 01230. Learn more at [www.dubois homesite.org](http://www.dubois homesite.org)

# GBLC Membership Form

Enclosed is my tax-deductible membership contribution to GBLC to support efforts to preserve and enhance the community's natural resources and distinctive character.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$20 Individual | <input type="checkbox"/> \$250 Guardian    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$35 Family     | <input type="checkbox"/> \$500 Steward     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$50 Supporter  | <input type="checkbox"/> \$1000 Sustaining |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$100 Conserver | <input type="checkbox"/> \$___ Other       |

CHECKS PAYABLE TO: **GBLC**

In addition to my membership, I would also like to support my favorite projects:

\$\_\_\_ RiverWalk for protection and stewardship of the Housatonic riverbank.

\$\_\_\_ Farmland Fund for the preservation of agricultural land and working farms.

\$\_\_\_ Lake Mansfield Alliance for the stewardship of the lake and its surroundings.

\$\_\_\_ Conservancy Endowment Fund to ensure the future preservation of Great Barrington's natural resources

\$\_\_\_ Friends of Du Bois Homesite

\$\_\_\_ Great Barrington Trails and Greenways

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# GREAT BARRINGTON LAND CONSERVANCY

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If you are interested in learning more about how to participate in Great Barrington Land Conservancy projects, please contact us at (413)-528-4456 or [greatbarringtonland@gmail.com](mailto:greatbarringtonland@gmail.com)

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GBLC logo courtesy of Michael McCurdy

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