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# LAKE MANSFIELD

Newsletter of the Great Barrington Land Conservancy

## Tremendous Improvements Coming!

by Christine Ward, Lake Mansfield Alliance Coordinator



It is SO HARD to have to wait to go to Lake Mansfield. But our patience will be rewarded- the work that is being completed this spring will bring enormous benefits to our lake and our community.

This may be one of Great Barrington's most ambitious environmental projects to date. The town's commitment to this effort is tremendous. Years of dedicated improvement planning are resulting in a comprehensive construction phase that honors the lake's ecosystem while also greatly improving recreational access.

Tremendous citizen volunteer effort with strategic planning and habitat improvement has helped to make this work possible. We are lucky to have community members that eagerly respond when help is needed. GBLC is committed to ensuring that the lake's native habitat fully recovers in the years to come. The joy we experience at Lake Mansfield fuels our ongoing work- it won't be long before we are enjoying the summer sun and water fun at Lake Mansfield again!



*Together, we will strive to safeguard this patch of thriving wildness and to secure resiliency, beauty, and health for the future.*

# Final Construction Phase for Lake Mansfield Improvement Plans

by Christopher Rembold, Town of Great Barrington Assistant Town Manager / Director of Planning and Community Development

**Work has resumed this spring. The lake edge and beach area are closed during this construction phase. The lakeside trail and beach area will be open to all in July.**

The Lake Mansfield Improvement Project is reaching its final stages after years of meetings and planning, and we are excited to be able to build on this success. Our work over the last decade has been to ensure that the lake continues to be a conserved natural area and a recreational resource for all of us.

This year the Lake Mansfield Improvement Plan will result in a trail connecting the shoreline, beach park, and forest. The parking lot will be reconfigured to allow ease of access and to capture and filter stormwater. The vehicle road along the lake edge will be replaced with a shared use path for walkers and bicyclists featuring improved filtration systems and a larger buffer zone featuring native plants and shrubs. If you're driving to the beach, you will come in from the north using Christian Hill Road to Lake Mansfield Road. Bikers and pedestrians can continue to travel to the beach area from the south on the new accessible trail.

The Castle Hill Avenue and boat launch stormwater mitigation systems have been successful. The three year water quality study involves Bard College at Simon's Rock students in data collection. Water sampling occurs approximately every month, or after every significant rain event, and takes place at seven locations around the lake. Preliminary water quality study data shows pollutants like sediment, nitrogen, and phosphorus are no longer increasing and are declining slightly when compared to the start of this study in 2021. Both of these compounds can increase aquatic plant growth. Our current work will further protect water quality through stormwater filtration along the shoreline and in the beach area.



*Simon's Rock interns collect water samples for study.*





Pavement has been milled out and will serve as the base for the new paving of the recreation path. The pavement closest to the water's edge will be permanently removed and replaced with vegetation.

Work is moving quickly. The newly designed parking lot took shape through the winter months, featuring a massive new stormwater retention area to prevent contamination of the lake and protect water quality. Next the contractors installed a new box culvert to carry the lake outlet stream. The box culvert is already working – even with all the late winter and spring rain, the road has not flooded.

By the middle of June, all paving should be completed, including in the parking lot at the beach area. It's likely that not all planting will be completed until the fall. We ask everyone to please stay out of areas where soils, grass, and plantings need time to grow and stabilize. And lastly, construction work area fencing is there for everyone's safety. Please do not enter areas that are fenced off.

Collaboration has been essential in informing this ambitious project and is equally important as we continue the work of habitat rehabilitation and community engagement.

**Get involved!** Lake Mansfield Improvement Task Force meetings are open to all. Visit [townofgb.org/lake-mansfield-improvement-task-force](http://townofgb.org/lake-mansfield-improvement-task-force) for more information about upcoming meetings.



## Great Barrington Launches Community Liaison Project, with Focus on Lake Mansfield

The Town of Great Barrington is excited to announce its collaboration with a local consultant team to undertake Community Liaison services. Jovanina Pagano and Sylvana Proaño will support the Town in its mission to cultivate a more cohesive, inclusive, and thriving community by engaging directly with residents - particularly those who may experience marginalization. The goal of this project is to establish meaningful, reciprocal connections between all community members and the Town.

The initial focus of the Community Liaison team will be the Lake Mansfield project. They will work to spread awareness about the significant improvements underway and ensure that this invaluable public resource is a safe and welcoming space for all.



# Volunteers Jump Start Lake Mansfield Shoreline Restoration

by Dale Abrams, Naturalist and GBLC Board Member

For more than a decade the Lake Mansfield Improvement Task Force has dreamed of a day when restoration work would begin along the eroded eastern shore of Lake Mansfield. That day has finally come. Dedicated volunteers have compiled detailed inventories of native trees, shrubs, flowers, and wetland plants that form the natural buffer zone along the shores of Lake Mansfield. Using this input, the landscape design team has finalized a restoration planting plan that has been tailored to reflect and highlight the native biodiversity of Lake Mansfield and southern Berkshire County.

Volunteers labeled native plants with colorful ribbons along the bank to help guide the work ahead. A team of engineers, designers, construction staff, and GBLC volunteer botanists recently walked along the road with the goal of identifying key shoreline areas to protect during the final construction phase. Clusters of speckled alder, shining willow, and silky dogwood shrubs, as well winterberry, wild rose, blueberry, and spice bush were noted as prime examples of the healthy shoreline buffer zone. During the site visit the team marked where new drainage systems will cross under the future trail and where the shoreline will be disturbed, shifting the alignment whenever possible to protect healthy native plants.



*Greg Brawdgers (construction contractor project manager), Dale Abrams (GBLC), Emma Sass (Massachusetts MVP program), Megan McDevitt (engineer from Woodard & Curran), town planner Chris Rembold, Danielle Desilets (landscape architect from KZLA) on March 11th, 2024.*



*Devan Arnold and Dale Abrams compiled an inventory of native plants that is being used in the next stages of developing a vigorous native habitat.*

On a blustery evening in late March, a team of eight volunteers swooped in to clip and bundle hundreds of native willow, dogwood, and wild rose shoots growing in the disturbance zones. These plants will then be used to revegetate the shoreline once it is rebuilt and stabilized. The excitement among volunteers was palpable that day despite cold and windy conditions. These cuttings collected by our volunteers will be propagated by Bridghe McCracken and her team at Helia Native Nursery, who are donating time and materials to help preserve and reproduce the genetic diversity of local plants well-suited to the shore of Lake Mansfield. Her team will astoundingly turn a few hundred cuttings into 600 or more small plants over the next 6 months.







Before long, hundreds of small willows, dogwoods, and roses will be replanted along the eastern shore of Lake Mansfield near Whale Rock, where a new recreational trail will follow the shoreline. Restoration planting takes time to establish, but in a few short years the areas along the lake shoreline trail will be flush with green and flowering native plants.

Getting outdoors with a group of nature stewards is both engaging and rewarding, and opportunities abound to join ongoing GBLC projects. Join us! Visit [GBLand.org/volunteer](https://GBLand.org/volunteer) for more information.

## Lake Mansfield Boat Launch Improvements



In 2023 a sturdy group of volunteers met up throughout the year at the boat launch to improve the lakeside habitat and create a welcoming space for visitors. With permission from the Department of Public Works and Conservation Commission, the team shifted the large kiosk, moved boulders, installed coir logs to prevent runoff of new soil into the lake, regraded and tamped fresh topsoil, spread grass seed, and covered the area with burlap to prevent erosion while seeds germinate.

Thank you to our incredible volunteers - their efforts are crucial to preserve and enhance our community's vital natural resource!





# Volunteer Spotlight: Bridghe McCracken

Bridghe McCracken, Founder of Helia Land Design and Helia Native Nursery, is joining Lake Mansfield's multi-year volunteer commitment to strengthen the lake's natural habitat.

Bridghe has over 20 years experience in land stewardship, as well as designing landscapes, gardens, and food systems in Berkshire County. She is an educator for sustainable land stewardship, native plant design, and propagation. She is also a Great Barrington Land Conservancy advisor.

Bridghe grew up very close to Lake Mansfield, and is eager to bring her understanding and skills to caring for our special place. "As a child, I rode my bike to Lake Mansfield with my sisters every day. It was there that we grew up learning how to swim and explore, creating unforgettable memories on those beautiful endless summer days by the lake. Now, whenever I visit Lake Mansfield, it serves as a nostalgic reminder of the laughter and love it provided us with. I hope the joy and connection of the lake can be enjoyed by generations to come."

This year Bridghe and her team are nurturing native plants from cuttings harvested from the disturbance zones created by the improvement construction at Lake Mansfield. The plantlings will be returned to the shoreline as part of our restoration efforts. Bridghe has also committed to a restoration planting of the forest buffer zone behind the new parking lot that will be accomplished as part of Helia's Carbon Offset Initiative.

Helia Native Nursery recognizes that local and global ecosystems are threatened by climate change, pollution, and urban development. Helia's Carbon Offset Initiative allows participants to take direct action to offset carbon emissions by planting native trees in conserved areas throughout Berkshire County. In the coming year, this initiative will help bring improvements to the health of our community, as well as our changing planet, right on the shores of Lake Mansfield.

Volunteers are welcome to join the planting! Reach out by email [info@lakemansfield.org](mailto:info@lakemansfield.org) if you are interested.



*Bridghe is propagating/grafting tree cuttings that were harvested along the shoreline of Lake Mansfield earlier this spring, and they will be ready for lake edge planting in the fall.*

You can join Helia's 7th Annual Tree Planting Campaign by purchasing 5 trees (\$185). These trees are available to take home and plant on your own land, or can be donated to this year's program to be planted at Lake Mansfield as part of the habitat rehabilitation work.

Every five trees planted will offset the carbon emitted by 1 car over the course of a year. Official tree adoption certificates are available to share as gifts for the holidays! For more information visit: [www.helianativenursery.com/news-1/7th-annual-tree-planting-campaign](http://www.helianativenursery.com/news-1/7th-annual-tree-planting-campaign)



## Greenagers Are An Important Part of the Lake Mansfield Effort

by Christine Ward

Each year donations dedicated to Lake Mansfield allows us to hire Greenager Trail Crews to supplement our ongoing volunteer efforts.

In the past Greenager crews have installed or repaired crush stone paths, built and installed trailhead kiosks, battled invasive plant species, and trimmed the trail corridor during the height of the growing season. These young crews are energetic and enthusiastic. While working elbow to elbow they learn methods needed to care for our native woodlands and practice the skills required to maintain community trails.

Hard work builds confidence, and working on community projects helps to develop a sense of connection and capability. We are honored to help support teens and Greenagers as an important part of our Lake Mansfield Community.

This year, along with the usual summer trail maintenance, Greenagers will be hired to repair the Christian Hill entrance area where torrential rains caused some major problems. This Christian Hill Road entrance remains open to allow forest trail access while the beach is closed.

Come explore the forest trails and see the amazing work that has been done!

## Water Chestnut Monitoring

by Dale Abrams

Last year, industrious volunteers successfully removed ten 5-gallon buckets full of water chestnut plants in early summer before they went to seed. While most of the plants were concentrated along the shore in the northwest corner of the lake, small clumps were found as far as 1,000 feet from the main colony. GBLC received permission from the town's conservation commission to monitor and remove invasive water chestnut plants from Lake Mansfield that were discovered in 2021.

Volunteers will be needed to pull and monitor again this year to prevent future spreading. Woods Pond in Lee has become fully covered with water chestnut, so the threat of expansion at Lake Mansfield is ominous. Monitoring can be as simple as paddling slowly and looking for the rosettes of leaves. Removal involves careful pulling, collection, and drying of the plants. Please email Dale Abrams ([abramsdaile@gmail.com](mailto:abramsdaile@gmail.com)) if you are interested in lending a hand.



### You can help!

Lake Mansfield volunteers are needed to remove this plant by hand as soon as they emerge in the spring. Please let us know if you'd like to bring a boat and lend a hand with stewardship efforts this year and beyond. Visit [www.GBLand.org/volunteer](http://www.GBLand.org/volunteer) to get involved.



# Summer Programs at Lake Mansfield



## Summer Lakeside Yoga

There's no better way to start a summer day! This donation-based yoga class is for all levels- beginners are always welcomed and supported. Participants should bring a yoga mat and a towel. The instructor Senta Reis is Kripalu trained and certified. Suggested donation is \$10 per class. A portion of proceeds from class are donated to Lake Mansfield Alliance. **Classes are on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays from July 2nd through August 31st from 8am - 9am.** For more information about yoga classes at Lake Mansfield visit [GBLand.org](http://GBLand.org). For updated information, changes, or cancellations due to weather, please visit the Facebook page "Yoga on Lake Mansfield."

## Meet Tom Tynning's Scaled, Tailed and Bulging Eye Friends!

Have you ever held a tiny turtle or gazed into the eyes of a charming milk snake? No? Fear not! Tom Tynning is headed back to Lake Mansfield this summer so that families can get up close and personal with creatures that we usually just get to glimpse.

Tom is professor of environmental science at Berkshire Community College, author of *A Guide to Amphibians and Reptiles*, and an expert Berkshire County naturalist. His enthusiasm and excitement for the wiggliest and scaliest creatures is contagious! We can't wait to be captivated again this summer by his terrific stories and by his friendly reptiles and amphibians.

*Date and time to be determined.*

For more information email [info@gbland.org](mailto:info@gbland.org).





## Bluegrass at the Lake: Special Summer Fundraiser – 2nd Annual!

We are excited to announce the date for the return of Bluegrass at the Lake! This lively community gathering kicked off last year with great success and is back for another round on **Saturday, August 31 from 3-6pm**. The event will once again feature the bluegrass trio of Kate Roblin on fiddle, Sam Clement on guitar, and Dave Lawlor on mandolin. The group has performed at a variety of venues large and small throughout Vermont, the New York Capital Region, and the Berkshires. Proceeds will go toward the on-going stewardship of all GBLC properties. More details to come!



## Birds of the Berkshires and Annual Meeting



*Cedar Waxwing photograph by Sharon Siter.*

Each year our fields, forests, lakes and rivers provide the habitat needed for an amazing number of nesting and migratory bird species. A broad range of species is an indicator of our ability to provide healthy and diverse habitats.

On Saturday, June 22, 2024 from 1:00-2:30 PM Great Barrington Land Conservancy invites you to its annual meeting at Saint James Place on Main Street, Great Barrington to learn more about native and migratory bird species from two local experts Chip Blake and Ben Nickley. Our brief annual meeting will include a vote on GBLC's new board of directors, an overview of our 2023 efforts, and goals for 2024. This will be an opportunity to meet GBLC program leaders and learn more about how you can get involved in stewardship and conservation.

Please register for this free program [on our website](#). All are welcome. Resources for beginning birders and opportunities to participate in a newly developing program for Bobolink Monitoring at the McAllister Wildlife Refuge will be provided.

# Everyday at Lake Mansfield

Brings the possibility of giving back, meeting up with old friends, and discovering new adventures.

By Christine Ward



On September 11th, 2023, the beach area was teeming with activity. Bob Kraus along with Greg and Christine Ward arrived at the beach area to install two newly donated benches. Armed with shovels, footings, and tools they worked together to dig, measure, and install the footings to attach the benches. Deep 10" X 10" footings were buried to help keep the benches secure.



CHP Program leader Kim Waterman led a lively group of kids and their adults on an adventure through the Lake Mansfield Forest. Along the trail they collected nature treasures, and they shared their special finds when they returned to the beach area. All the while the children were curious about the bench installation and they often ran over to inspect the action.



While their adults relaxed and chatted at the picnic table, the young adventurers explored the playground, climbing to challenging heights and working together to push one another on the spinner. Eli Butcher was grinning from ear to ear, delighted to see all the activity and benches installed at the beach he has enjoyed since childhood.







*Community Health Program (CHP) Lake Mansfield Adventure for Kids and Caregivers.*

## Thank You 2023 Lake Mansfield Donors!

In 2023 generous donors contributed \$16,143.75 to Great Barrington Land Conservancy for the care and maintenance of Lake Mansfield. These funds empowered our enormous volunteer efforts. Lake Mansfield is a special place for the children of today and future generations.

Ronni Aronow  
 Tom and Marie Blauvelt  
 Robert and Donna Boyer  
 Sayzie Carr  
 Roselle and Alan Chartock  
 Catherine Clark  
 Charles and Ada Beth Cutler  
 Sarah Dinan  
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 Jo Valens  
 Ward's Nursery  
 Christine Ward  
 Fran Wishnick



**Lake Mansfield is a project of Great Barrington Land Conservancy.**

**Donations dedicated to Lake Mansfield fuel the work we accomplish each year.**



# 2024 Lake Mansfield Volunteer Workdays

*Joyful Work is Invigorating and Satisfying!*

Register at [www.GBLand.org](http://www.GBLand.org). Volunteers should come with work gloves, water bottles, and protective clothing.



## Saturday, June 1, 9:30-11:30 – Forest and Trails

While improvements are being completed at the beach and along Lake Mansfield Road, we will focus our efforts on the forest and trails! Tasks include litter clean-up, clearing limbs, and removing invasive plants, along with working near the Christian Hill Road entrance to repair washed out sections of trail. Workdays will be led by Christine Ward, Kate and Brad Roblin.

## Forest Invasive Removal

Led by Christine Ward

Join our forest management team to focus on removing invasive plants and promoting a healthy woodland. Date and time to be determined.

## Water Chestnut Removal

Led by Dale Abrams.

Date and time to be determined.

Visit [GBLand.org](http://GBLand.org) for more information.

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## GREAT BARRINGTON LAND CONSERVANCY

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*GBLand.org*

Graphic Design by Amelia Wood  
GBLC logo courtesy of Michael McCurdy

**GBLC is dedicated to conservation and stewardship of our community's natural resources and special places.**

We work to protect open space for ecological, recreational, agricultural, and scenic purposes. We organize community volunteers on behalf of land conservation and stewardship. We partner with local, regional, and national land trust organizations. We support sustainable agriculture as a means of preserving our farming heritage. We support neighborhood initiatives that align with our mission.