



FIELD NOTES

Newsletter of the Great Barrington Land Conservancy

A Tribute to Rachel Fletcher, Founder of River Walk from the Board of the Great Barrington Land Conservancy

More than 180 people celebrated Rachel Fletcher, River Walk, and her 30 years of community activism at an event at Crissey Farms. The following remarks were made by GBLC's President, Janice Kabel:

"When we think about the history of environmental leadership in our country, it is the efforts of three women that stand out:

First, we remember Rachel Carson, who rallied the country around her to save our natural habitats and wildlife from pesticide pollution. She taught us that conservation begins with reclaiming what we have lost.

We also remember the author Marjory Stoneman Douglas, who used the power of her writings over decades to exhort Floridians to prevent development of the Everglades and to preserve it forever. She showed us that no environmental fight is too big to take on if the community is with you.

And now we also think of Rachel Fletcher standing with these women,

because she showed the same qualities of vision, leadership and fierce determination. She harnessed the vision of the community to clean up the eyesore behind Melvin's Pharmacy and create the hidden natural world that is the Housatonic River Walk. She enlisted hundreds of volunteers to rebuild the area and then insisted that we maintain the river's edge at the highest ecological standards. She wrote innumerable grant applications and fundraising letters, secured access to the land, hauled out the rubbish, planted native plants and helped rake the gravel so that Great Barrington could have its own National Recreational Trail and the W.E.B. Du Bois River Park. Rachel is our environmental heroine.

Rachel is an original member of the Board of the Great Barrington Land Conservancy from the time we organized in 1991. In many ways, our organization grew up around Rachel and her efforts to create the Housatonic River Walk. Rachel's leadership has informed all of our efforts, and thus, all our special places,

with the highest standards of design, construction and maintenance.

Now, we seek to preserve the Housatonic River Walk for future generations through the Future Fund, the dollars needed to sustain Rachel's work. On our Board, we also think of Rachel as leaving us a great fund of knowledge that is the foundation of our work. Rachel...GBLC and our community all thank you for your environmental leadership."

Today marks the beginning of the next chapter in the story of the River Walk and other natural places. Who will join us to repair this corner of the world? In his classic children's book on the environment, Dr. Seuss says: "Unless someone like YOU cares a whole awful LOT, nothing is going to get better. It's not." The Land Conservancy looks to YOU to care... and to carry on Rachel's legacy.

With your support, as donors and volunteers, Rachel's achievements will be part of our community for generations to come.

The event was co-sponsored by Rep. Smitty Pignatelli, Housatonic Heritage, and Crissey Farms.

As Rachel enters a new life chapter, GBLC is committed to continuing in Rachel's footsteps. River Walk will be directed by Christine Ward, a most capable successor.



Volunteers doing major clean up to pave the way for River Walk



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Facebook!

We are grateful to the donors who support all of our GBLC projects, including the Lake Mansfield Alliance (LMA), River Walk (RW) and River Walk Future Fund (RWFF), as well as our Community Partners and Business Sponsors of the 8th annual Run for the Hills (RFTH)



October 14, 2018, beautiful fall weather for Run for the Hills participants

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Run for the Hills, 2018--Getting the running bug: participants in the Kids Fun Run

Let's Get our Kids Outside!

By Christine Ward



The Pfeiffer Arboretum is a great place for Families (A. Minoff)

Adventures in our natural spaces are key to helping our kids connect to place, discover nature, and find enjoyment in the great outdoors. These shared adventures are essential to building a healthy community and securing the future of conservation. Here's one of story of how your land conservancy is building long lasting connections:

On Wednesday, June 13th, 2018, twelve boisterous thirteen-year-old boys clambered out of the school bus that had delivered them to the Pfeiffer Arboretum. Though none of the boys had ever been to this preserve before, many of them had collapsible fishing poles hidden in their backpacks. They were about to begin a 3-day service project (Youth Engagement Service Days) piloted this year at Monument Valley Middle School. They had specifically chosen this project because each day brought them to a new body of water. None of these energy-packed students had ever visited the Pfeiffer Ar-

boretum before – they were in for a busy day of hard work and discovery. First, they found and labeled 12 native tree species to create a tree walk that would be enjoyed by visitors for the rest of the season. Then, they formed 3-person teams to carefully repaint all of the trails many blue blazes. Finally, at 2 pm, with just an hour left of their first service day, the boys were faced with the “Big Log Challenge”. Not a problem! As a mighty team they succeeded with brute strength and wild ingenuity to move enormous sections of a fallen white pine out of the trail corridor. The boys left that day tired and impressed by their work and just a little disappointed to learn that fishing was not allowed in the Long Pond reservoir. They perked up when they heard that their next 2 days would bring them to Housatonic Flats and then to Lake Mansfield, two great places where fishing is celebrated!

GBLC coordinated with Berkshire Natural Resources Council and Housatonic Valley Association (HVA) to provide this special service experience. On Day 2 the boys installed new signage and battled invasive species at Housatonic Flats. On Day 3 these same students planted over 100 native perennial species to create a new pollinator garden at Lake Mansfield

and, after receiving paddling safety training from HVA, they teamed up in canoes to scour the shoreline for trash, and they used their break times to cast lines and compete for number of fish caught and released. It was amazing to see what boundless energy can accomplish! Many of the boys talked about bringing their families to the worksites to see what they had done.

In 2019, you, your family and your friends are encouraged to explore and volunteer in the outdoor spaces you love. Great Barrington Land Conservancy is gearing up to provide a series of spring volunteer days, special guided hikes, and special events aimed at supporting our community's connection to our treasured natural resources. We'll be keeping you informed of great things to see and do.

Go to www.GBLand.org to volunteer and check out upcoming events.

You may donate to GBLC, GBLC projects (including River Walk) and the River Walk Future Fund by going to GBLand.org or mailing your donation to P.O. Box 987, Great Barrington, MA 01230.



Middle School Volunteers at the Pfeiffer Arboretum (C. Ward)

Visit GBLand.org to get updates on our latest initiatives, to become a member, to donate or to volunteer.

GREAT BARRINGTON LAND CONSERVANCY

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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.

GBLand.org

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