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# LAKE MANSFIELD

Newsletter of the Great Barrington Land Conservancy

## The Lake Mansfield We All Love

by Christine Ward, Lake Mansfield Alliance Coordinator

So many folks escape to Lake Mansfield to walk, bike, fish, or launch a boat out into the cool morning stillness. Truly, the heart soars when experiencing the beauty of water meeting sky. At the lake we experience the spaciousness of open water, the buzz of dragonflies, the song of redwing blackbirds, and the play of the sun and wind. We become more resilient with this powerful and healing connection to nature.

Each of us has a role to play in caring for this special place. For several years we have made steady strides forward— the health of the lake and forest depend upon this informed and long-term commitment. But most importantly it depends upon people like you to be an advocate and supporter. We must build a strong coalition to insure that this good work is sustained. Only a strongly committed community can ensure that this gift is kept safe for future generations.

**We need you to pitch in: be a lake advocate at public meetings and consider a donation for annual improvements – together we can protect our lake for everyone to enjoy.**



*Featured in the above photo: Lake Mansfield Alliance collaborated with Housatonic Valley Association to host a Volunteer Day for our local middle school students in June 2019.*

# Improvements at Lake Mansfield & Next Steps for Lake Mansfield Road

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



Over the last decade the Town of Great Barrington and Lake Mansfield Alliance have worked together to complete significant projects which protect the health of the Lake Mansfield Watershed with the goal of preserving Lake Mansfield for future generations. The following are success stories of current efforts as well as information about the redesign of Lake Mansfield Road—one of the most important projects the Lake has ever seen.

## Knob Hill Stormwater Improvements

The stormwater improvement project on Knob Hill Road was completed last May. This steep road was a major source of stormwater runoff or nonpoint source pollution (including rain storms and snow melt), which can threaten water quality and increase weed growth. Deep-sump catch basins and a stormwater separator were installed along the side of the road, creating a system that will catch and keep pollutant-laden runoff out of the lake. Together with the boat launch improvements completed in 2018, the Knob Hill Road project is helping to make pollution at the south end of



Lake Mansfield a thing of the past! This project was funded in part by the Town and by a grant from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), through the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) under section 319 of the Clean Water Act. The Great Barrington Land Conservancy has contributed funding for habitat reclamation, which is the final stage of this project.

## Parking Lot Improvements at the Beach and Forest Trail Area

The 2018 Watershed Based Plan identified other stormwater runoff problems around Lake Mansfield, including a dirt parking lot at the north end of the lake serving patrons of the beach and the forest trail system. The Town has received another EPA / Mass DEP grant for this project through section 604b of the Clean Water Act. This spring engineers will design stormwater best management practices, such as swales and catch basins, to reduce and treat runoff before it enters the lake. With these designs ready, we will be eligible to apply for grants to construct these stormwater runoff reduction measures and go forward with these improvements.





### Lake Mansfield Road Improvements

In early 2019, after years of research and study, the Lake Mansfield Improvement Task Force made its recommendation to the Town's Selectboard for improving Lake Mansfield Road. In June 2019, the Great Barrington Selectboard voted in favor of the Task Force's recommendation to close the road to vehicular traffic between the boat launch and the beach area. The public will still be able to drive to the beach area, but from the north end only. The new design will include access for emergency services and access from the north to the existing residence at 30 Lake Mansfield Road and to East View Pool. The long-term plan includes stabilization of the lake edge, stormwater drainage improvements, removal of a portion of the existing roadway, and installation of a new recreational path.

This plan has been vetted through many years of discussion, public scrutiny, and intensive professional study. While this was a controversial decision, the Selectboard, the Task Force, and many community members recognize that closing the most problematic portion of the road to traffic, stabilizing the bank, increasing the buffer zone, and reducing stormwater pollution will vastly improve the long-term health of the lake.

In the meantime, you may have noticed that the road is currently one-way, so vehicles can travel only from south to north. This decision was made by the Selectboard because it is important to limit vehicular traffic at the lake edge until the long-term improvement plan, including the road closure and creation of a lakeside recreation trail, can be implemented.



### Next Steps for the Town of Great Barrington

In order to implement the long-term plan, Town officials will seek voter approval at the upcoming Town Meeting (scheduled for Monday, June 22, 2020) for \$165,000 that will be used to prepare 100% engineered and permitted plans. Once those plans are developed over the course of a year or two, the Town could then seek grants in order to fully implement this project. Continued opportunities for community input will be included in this final design phase.

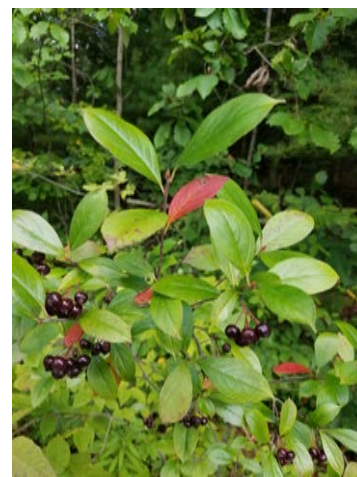
For further information, please visit:

- [Great Barrington Town website for Improvement Plan](#)
- [Great Barrington Town website for CPA application](#)
- [Lake Mansfield Presentation Updated April 19th](#)
- [Great Barrington Land Conservancy's website for more on Lake Mansfield](#)



# Knob Hill Habitat Restoration

by Devan Arnold, landscape designer at Sassafra Land Care, LLC



**Great Barrington Land Conservancy, through its project with Lake Mansfield Alliance, funded the essential improvements to the Lake Mansfield habitat discussed below.**

In the late spring of 2019, the triangle of land that forms the southeast tip of Knob Hill underwent a drastic transformation as part of a stormwater mitigation project by the Town of Great Barrington. The privately owned 2,400 square foot area at the bottom of the slope was stripped of vegetation and excavated to install new drains, basins, and underground piping. Though this project was a critical long-term investment for both the town and the lake, the loss of mature forest trees and associated understory vegetation was felt by the local human community and broader ecological community.

Native perennial vegetation serves an important role in maintaining healthy ecosystem processes like water filtration and soil stabilization, as well as providing important food and habitat resources to wildlife, pollinators, and other beneficial organisms. Recognizing that, the Great Barrington Land Conservancy partnered with the private landowner, the Town of Great Barrington, Ward's Nursery and Garden Center, and Sassafra Land Care to replant the hillside with a suite of native species.

In the fall of 2019, the first of two phases of planting were completed by Sassafra Land Care including twelve species of native trees and shrubs, several red oaks grown from acorns collected in the neighborhood, white oak, paper birch, serviceberry, black chokeberry, silky dogwood, witch hazel, spicebush, nine-bark, steplebush, and arrowwood viburnum.

The second phase of planting will take place in the late spring of 2020 and will involve adding a mix of native grasses, ferns, and wildflowers from thirteen different species to provide a diversity of blooms, textures, and beneficial habitats to the landscape. Grasses used for this site include big bluestem, tufted hairgrass, and Pennsylvania Sedge (not a true grass), while ferns include sensitive and wood ferns. Wildflowers include columbine, swamp milkweed, boneset, flat-top goldenrod, cardinal flower, brown eyed susan, bluewood aster, and New England Aster.

As this new patch of habitat establishes and matures it will provide important habitat and valuable food resources for pollinators and other crucial members of the ecological community while also satisfying the aesthetic needs of the neighborhood's many visitors. During the design process for this planting, a lake-side plant survey was conducted in order to develop a palette of existing and appropriate species for use in future restoration projects around Lake Mansfield.

Donations to Lake Mansfield Alliance help us to move forward with this work and other habitat improvements. Visit: [www.GBLand.org](http://www.GBLand.org)

To learn more about Sassafra Land Care, visit: [www.sassafra.landcare.com](http://www.sassafra.landcare.com)



# Lake Mansfield Vernal Pool

by Dale Abrams, Naturalist and GBLC Board Member



amphibians at least), stealthy salamanders and hopping frogs emerge by cover of darkness to return to their natal pools for a brief bacchanal rendezvous. Salamanders "congress", a writhing underwater courtship dance that may include 15-20 salamanders or more. Females wait in the wings to collect a gelatinous spermatophore gift from her chosen suitor before laying eggs that cling to underwater branches or stems. Wood frogs by the dozens or hundreds float almost invisibly on the water's surface making odd duck-like quacking croaks to attract a mate. Amplexus is a frog mating stance during which the male hugs the female and waits until she lays two or three hundred glassy eggs before fertilizing them.

COVID-19 has changed a lot of things. One thing for sure is that folks are outside enjoying the fresh air along the shore of Lake Mansfield like never before. Sure, the road is safer now with one lane closed and dedicated to pedestrians. Folks are clearly appreciating fewer and slower cars in this space. A stroll by the lake has become a novel experience for many newfound and rekindled nature explorers. Something about the pandemic seems to be sending folks to nature for solace and renewal.



I've been visiting the lake and surrounding woods for decades, by day or night during all seasons of the year, and every time I do I feel blessed. Each season is precious in its own way. Spring is unique because it brings a secret parade by cover of darkness: a chorus of frogs heralds the return of amphibians to the lake shore and nearby vernal pools. Many walkers have paused in recent weeks to peer into a small roadside pool, sprouting with red dogwood stems, in search of the source of a strange quacking sound emanating from the algae and leaf-filled water. Some catch a brief glimpse of the elusive wood frogs who only linger for a few days before hopping back to their woodland home. With excited whispers in their voices, you can tell that these nature explorers are part of the all-welcome club of those who marvel at this timeless ritual of spring.

On warmer nights the air fills with the high-pitched voices of tiny spring peepers whose many calls blend into a ringing chorus that drifts well beyond the lake. If you venture out with a flashlight you may glimpse hundreds of paired eyes shining back at you. Or, if you cast a red lens beam into the water, you might spy the shy black and yellow spotted salamanders putting on an unpublicized show. Silent and unseen by most, these amphibious marvels are just a sampling of the special friends who share the vernal pools and other precious habitats in the greater Lake Mansfield natural area.

To truly experience these fascinating amphibians, one must dress like one and wade into an early spring night when the temperature hovers around 40-50 F and rain moistens the woods and nearby roads. When the weather is just right (for

Please help us protect and restore this natural treasure for all creatures, great and small, and for future generations to enjoy; become a member and vote in support of the lake during town meetings.

# Yoga on Lake Mansfield:

## Gratitude, Intention, Community Self Care

### by Senta Reis

*Seven years ago Senta Reis and Christine Ward met to create a plan to bring accessible, affordable yoga to the beautiful space of Lake Mansfield. Christine came as a devoted steward of the lake and Senta as a devoted supporter of yoga and nature as a powerful practice for well-being. The concept was simple: offer donation-based lakeside yoga throughout the summer with seasoned teachers. A portion of the proceeds would go to the instructor and a portion to support the Lake Mansfield Alliance for the care of the lake. We were welcomed by the Great Barrington Parks and Recreation Commission when we presented our idea, and the summer yoga program was born. What has transpired has been a dream come true.*



#### Practicing Yoga in Community

The gifts of yoga are many; inner calm, personal strength and health, and the nurturing of equanimity towards life's ups and downs. Another gift is a sense of belonging to a group of other like-minded people. But beyond the benefits for each individual and the cultivation of daily practice, there is another powerful reason to practice specifically TOGETHER with others.

When we meet together, center ourselves together, breathe together, move together, and then finally intend together in quiet grateful reflection of what is good and what can be, we send a powerful pulse of well-being into the world. It ripples out like a homeopathic dose of good medicine. When we practice yoga at Lake Mansfield, our good intentions are felt by our planet and fellow creatures.

We need this medicine now as individuals, as a community, as a nation, and as a planet. Nature needs this from us. This is the impulse behind an accessible community practice held and supported by the nurturing beauty of a practice out in nature. We welcome all to share in this vision.

Given our current challenges with COVID-19, our summer yoga program will be dependent upon the lifting of current sanctions. We hope to see you again in July, but if this is not possible we will be in touch with other ways to connect with yoga and nature.





## YOU make a big difference.

People like you bring annual improvements to the Lake Mansfield Beach Area and Conservation Forest Trails. You can join these recent supporters and make a dedicated donation to the Great Barrington Land Conservancy that will be used specifically for Lake Mansfield Improvements.

Susanna & Jonathan Baum  
 Robert and Donna Boyer  
 Alan and Roselle Chartock  
 Karen Christensen  
 Charles & Ada Beth Cutler  
 Ron & Sharon Dlugosz  
 Nina & Richard Evans  
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 Senta Reis  
 Patricia Blair Ryan  
 Beth Sackler  
 Susan & Judd Shoval  
 Mary Stephen  
 Jo Valens  
 Susan Witt  
 Gillian Zackham



### Connecting with Nature During Challenging Times by Amelia Wood, Admin. Assistant

During the month of April we held a Tree Seed Photo Challenge providing families and individuals with fun nature-focused activities to do at home. This event, planned months in advance, ended up being the perfect activity for these challenging times. Each week we posted a photo of a tree seed and asked viewers to identify it (shown in the images above). Every participant was entered into a raffle prize drawing and the winners were randomly chosen on Arbor Day.

In those four weeks we highlighted some wonderful native tree species. You can find pictures and descriptions of them on our website. We also shared at-home nature activities from local and global organizations and organizers, as well as some recommended nature book titles. Please share them with your friends and family!

Don't forget that the trails within the Lake Mansfield Forest are great for family strolls and exploration! Learn more at [www.GBLand.org](http://www.GBLand.org).

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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.

Follow Us:



@GreatBarringtonLandConservancy

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**You can help preserve, protect, and enhance Lake Mansfield  
as a vital habitat and community resource.**

