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LAKE MANSFIELD

Newsletter of the Great Barrington Land Conservancy

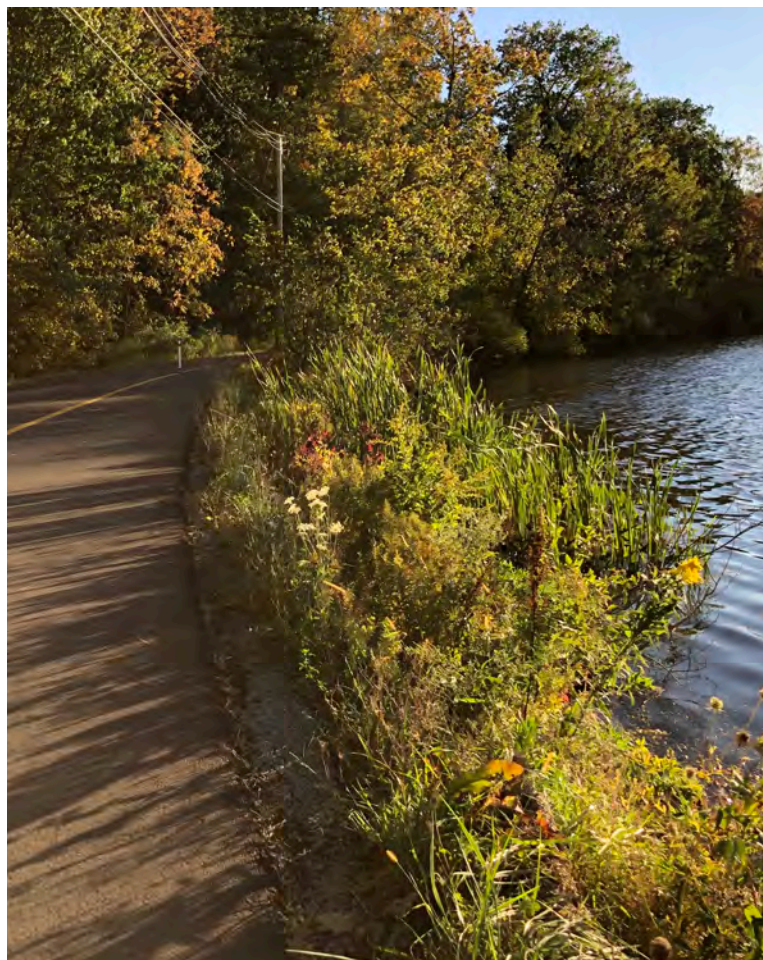
Caring for Lake and Community

by Christine Ward, Lake Mansfield Alliance Coordinator

How can we support our natural ecosystems?

2021 is a year of re-understanding ways of relating to ourselves, our families, and our communities. We are joined by a common experience of isolation. Many have discovered that keeping healthy requires daily excursions out-of-doors, demonstrating that connections to nature are crucial to our well-being.

At Lake Mansfield we have seen how the workings of people, especially our roads, can have a seriously detrimental impact on the places we love. Since 2008, we have made progress in correcting problems and improving the health of the lake. The work is complicated, requiring years of commitment, but look at the results! This year we are finalizing plans that will replace a crumbling road with a rehabilitated shoreline and recreational trail as a next step for having a seriously positive impact on the lake that we love. Join a strong coalition to honor and respect the natural world and thus enhance the well-being of our community.



“Everything is connected, and communicating with respect and reciprocity, and out of this comes balance in our community, in our environment, based on principles like kinship, reciprocity, respect for elders, giving rise to complexity and adaptability and out of this come resilience.”

Suzanne Simard, *Nature's Internet: How Trees Talk to Each Other in a Healthy Forest*

Lake Mansfield Improvement Planning

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

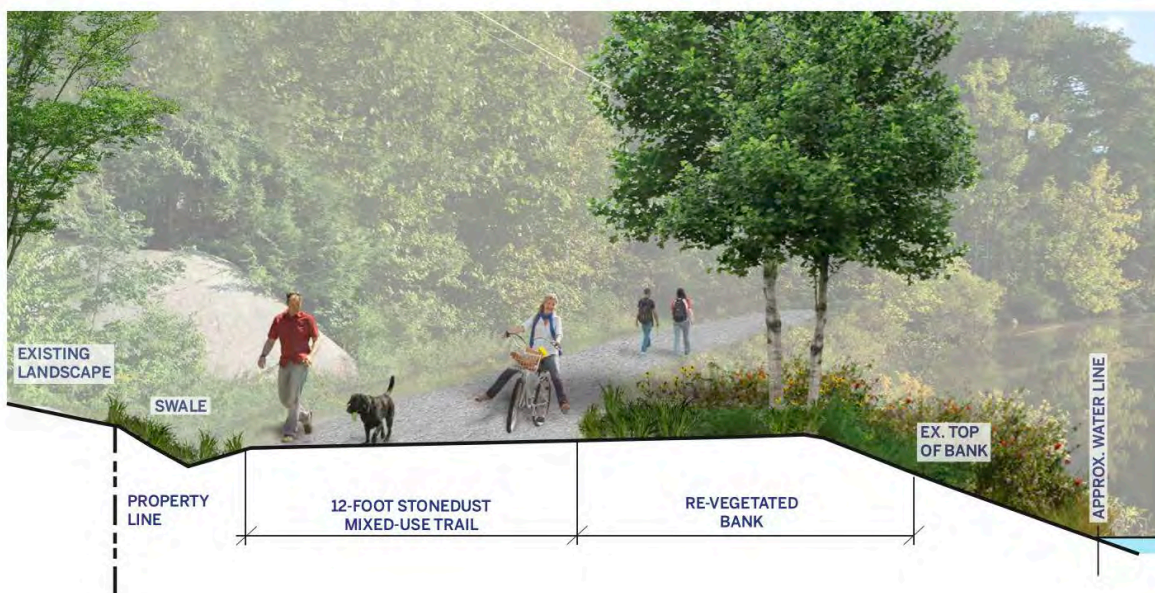
In March of 2020, the portion of Lake Mansfield Road between the boat launch and beach was transformed into a smoothly paved one-way road, creating space for a delineated recreation trail. Just as we needed places to go and ways to be safely socially distant, Lake Mansfield was there for us.

As I write this in March 2021, a year into a global pandemic, I think we could all agree that our parks and open spaces have become more essential than ever before. Our love, appreciation, and need for outdoor places has grown this past year and we recognize that havens like Lake Mansfield are essential to our physical and emotional well-being.

Readers of these pages may remember that in June of 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 (except for emergency access, limited access to the pool club, and the existing residences at 30 Lake Mansfield Road). In June of

2020, voters at the Annual Town Meeting affirmed that decision and awarded funding to develop designs, plans, and specifications to stabilize the bank, increase the buffer zone, reduce stormwater runoff, and convert the roadway into a new recreational path. This project also includes a redesign of the parking area and beach playground. Improvements will be made to the existing roadway north of the beach where the road will be raised and narrowed in order to alleviate flooding and runoff problems. The community will still be able to drive to the beach area, but from the north end only via Christian Hill Road.

For the past 12 months, the Lake Mansfield Improvement Task Force has worked with the engineering and landscape design team to fine tune the next phase of work. I am excited to say that when this issue of the newsletter goes to press in the spring of 2021, we will soon be sharing with you those initial plans!



Here is a snapshot of how the plans are shaping up, starting from the north:

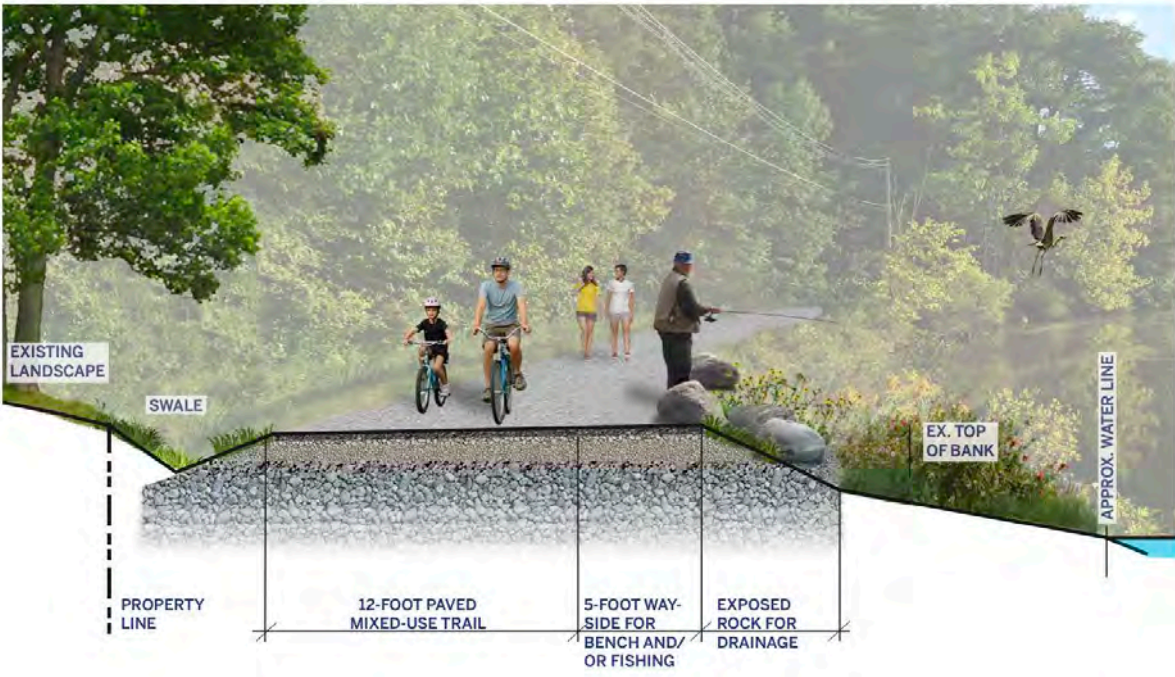
North end, near the lake outlet: In this area a new, larger outlet pipe will be installed to accommodate high lake levels and eliminate flooding concerns. As a result, the road will be narrower and a little higher than it is now. There will be a short stretch of road where only one car can travel at a time. Much like a narrow covered bridge, cars can go both ways but they will yield to oncoming traffic before passing over the outlet pipe.

Beach and parking lot area: The new parking area will use some of the existing parking lot and will be shifted slightly northward. It will include stormwater management features to prevent runoff from polluting the lake. It will also have level or gently sloped paths and handicapped parking spaces to make it accessible for all. This new parking area will accommodate users of both the beach and forest trails and will include a loop road so that cars can circle around since the road south of the parking lot will not be open to cars (other than to the pool club and to the residence).

Whale rock area: South of the residence will be a car-free recreation path. In this area the new path will be about 12 feet wide, leaving 6 to 8 feet of room to stabilize the edge of the lake and plant a vegetated buffer strip to protect the lake water. New amenities will include benches and fishing access. Drainage issues will also be addressed. Emergency or utility vehicles will still be able to use this area if needed. What was once one of the most dangerous and problematic stretches of the road will be devoted to recreation and peaceful enjoyment.

Next Steps: The early design phase will last until approximately late May or June, after which we will transition to a more detailed engineering phase. The Task Force is hopeful that the detailed engineering plans will enable the Town to be awarded grant funding in 2022 in order to construct these improvements in 2023. Until construction begins the road along the lake edge will remain as it is now— a recreational trail alongside a one-way road, open only for northbound traffic.

Keep in touch and learn more!
Go to lakemansfieldgb.org and GBLand.org to see improvement plans as they are posted.



Lake Mansfield Conservation Forest - A Trail is an Invitation to Enter

by Christine Ward



What is a forest? To the eyes it is a changing tapestry of color and light—now green and bright, now misty and grey, now copper, brushed with gold, amazing to behold. To the ears it is a twitter, a flutter and a screech, a scurry, a call - with silence tucked in among it all. And to the nose! Spicy and light, or musty and bold—scents that stir and waft on the breeze beneath tall trees. The forest is alive, ever-changing, a home to the plants and creatures that thrive there and a trail is an invitation to enter.

The Lake Mansfield Conservation Forest is owned by the Town of Great Barrington and overseen by the Conservation Commission. Since 2008, the trail building project and forest stewardship has been powered by an eclectic volunteer force and supported by diverse funding agents. This joyful collaboration is coordinated through Lake Mansfield Alliance, a project of GBLC, and the Town of Great Barrington with the guidance and support of the Conservation Commission and the Department of Public Works.

Each day the Lake Mansfield Forest Trails are enjoyed by a wide variety of visitors from near and away. Each year we raise funds and bring together the volunteers needed to care for our forest and the trail system. Volunteers spruce up the trails every spring and provide weekly maintenance throughout the season. We collect litter, trim back vegetation, battle invasive plant species, and refresh trail blazes. Donor support also allows LMA to hire Greenagers trail crews for work days in summer and fall, helping us to put local kids to work on community trails. Last year Greenagers crews re-widened and repaired the crush stone trail bed. We are working on ways to hire Greenagers for this year.

When we work in the forest, we have the opportunity to enjoy a variety of plants and bird species that flourish there. We catch glimpses of deer and the rare fox. We greet runners and walkers. And we experience the joy of working side by side for the good of all.

To learn more about volunteering see page 7.

In-Town Wilderness

By Kate Ritter and Brad Roblin

Kate and Brad have recently joined the Lake Mansfield stewardship team and have purchased a home adjacent to the Lake Mansfield Forest.

The first time we saw our property, it was a jungle. Invasives were creeping into the overgrown lawn and winding up the buildings, as well as screening the beautiful line of young maples along the northern border and the stream to the south. It was August, and the visual closeness was intensified by thick heat. As we walked through the structures, inspecting their strength and materials, we fell in love. These buildings and the surrounding land, although neglected, were truly special. For us, the property satisfied important criteria: in Great Barrington, near forest, and old. Our offer was accepted that evening, and thus began an adventure in stewardship.

With all of the work ahead, our thoughts centered on how lucky we were. Being skiers and hikers, who also enjoy food and culture, we assumed we might face a tough choice between having privacy and space versus proximity to the community. This property satisfied both, and we began referring to it as our “in-town wilderness.” We couldn’t believe that we could actually walk out our door and within a few minutes be on the Lake Mansfield trails; meanwhile, town was moments away in the opposite direction. Up until this point, we had been enjoying walks around the lake and trails routinely, often multiple times per day, and the area had become a respite from our nearby tiny apartment. It was extra meaningful to know that our efforts to restore our new (old) property inside and out were mirrored in the thoughtfully maintained trails and lake. When we took on our home project, we became part of a larger effort to care for the resources that are most important to our daily lives.

The months that followed brought consultation with a variety of experts: conservationists, tree companies, native species specialists...all with the goal of understanding the land and how best to guide it back to a thriving, maintained habitat. Similarly, our vision for the buildings (all constructed circa 1890) has been to repair and refresh the historic details and to create improvements as needed while celebrating the original character. Our property is our immediate environment, and also has a relationship with

the adjacent forest and the lake area, physically connected by the aforementioned stream and philosophically joined by a common intention. The work at Lake Mansfield, both completed and ongoing, inspires us every day, and we look forward to continuing our stewardship journey within and beyond our backyard.



Kate Ritter was born and raised in Great Barrington, and returned in 2017 after living in Vermont and in the Adirondacks for 13 years collectively. She works remotely as an architectural historian for an environmental consulting firm, and plays the fiddle in the Americana band Cradle Switch, based in Cambridge, New York.

Brad Roblin is originally from the Boston area, and relocated to the Berkshires for the nature-oriented lifestyle, after having visited with his family while growing up. He owns and operates Pro Workforce Performance, a business focused on functional movement, cognitive wellbeing, and injury prevention in the workplace.

Brad and Kate enjoy farm fresh foods and outdoor activity of all sorts. The two met at a yoga class in town, and it went from there.

New Play Structure is Coming

by Dale Abrams, Naturalist and GBLC Board Member



Lake Mansfield neighbors Susan and Judd Shoval recently made a donation to help the town purchase and install a new play structure at the beach/park area at Lake Mansfield. After a chance meeting at the boat launch, GBLC board member Dale Abrams caught up with Susan to learn more about their amazing gift.

DA: What motivated you to make a donation for a play structure at Lake Mansfield?

SS/JS: We loved the idea of installing safe and ADA-compliant equipment to the park. There is so much usage by young families, so we thought it would be well used and appreciated.

DA: What is your vision for how a play structure will support the Lake Mansfield Recreation Area beach/park space?

SS/JS: It will provide safe and age-appropriate challenges to all the children who come to the park. With input from the play equipment distributor, equipment was chosen for three distinct age groups up to the ages of 12 or 14. Keeping kids exercising and safely occupied can only enhance the park and provide benefits to all who frequent it!

DA: Did you have experience with similar projects in the past or is this a new endeavor for you?

SS/JS: We have never done anything like this before but, we did not feel as if we were “going it alone”.

We are providing a donation for equipment that has been requested and approved by the town and we are not involved with the placement.

DA: Do you have kids/grandkids and could you tell us a little about your family?

SS/JS: We have 4 children and 6 grandchildren, 4 of whom live next to us in Great Barrington and 1 who lives part time in Housatonic! They all love going to Lake Mansfield Park and also to the playground in Housatonic. They all actively swim in the summertime and ski at Butternut in the wintertime. We feel very fortunate.

DA: Anything else you'd like to share with us?

SS/JS: We are interested in supporting adult fitness as well, and, as such are also discussing adding a fitness trail.

DA: Thank you Susan and Judd for your generous gift to the community!

Note: The exact timing for the delivery and installation of the new play equipment is still to be determined but should happen in the not too distant future.

Let us know if you would like more information about how to support a new playground for Lake Mansfield.



Shoval grandkids love the outdoors!

2021 Lake Mansfield Spring and Summer Volunteer Workdays

Rather than our traditional May Lake Day event, a series of small group volunteer days will be held this year so we can care for our forest and lake while maintaining health protocols. Registration will be required to participate in order to help us ensure small group sizes.

Folks interested in volunteering must register by emailing info@gbland.org. Be sure to include the dates you are hoping to help out. Volunteers should come with masks, work gloves, and water bottles. Sanitized tools will be provided. Social distancing will be maintained.



PHOTO: May 19, 2019 Annual Clean Up and Family Fun Day

Saturday May 1st, 9:30 -11:30 - Beach Area 1

Led by Christine Ward
2 Leaders + 8 volunteers
Repair slats in garbage/recycle containers
Litter cleanup
Beach Kiosk updating

Saturday May 15th, 9:30 – 11:30 – Beach Area II

Led by Christine Ward
2 Leaders + 8 volunteers
Mulching of trees and shrubs in beach area
Planting of annuals
Repaint storage shed

Saturday May 22nd, 9:30-11:30 - Forest and Trails

Led by Christine Ward, Brad Roblin, and Kate Ritter
3 Leaders + 8 volunteers
Guided forest walk and trail assessment
Collect litter
Remove invasive species
Refresh trail blazes

Installation and Dedication of the Ruth Meier Memorial Bench

Early June date & time to be Determined

Boat Launch Habitat Improvements - Date and Time to be Determined

2 Leaders + 2 volunteers
Regrade edges to gracefully accommodate concrete boat entrance
Plant spaces with appropriate native plants
Plant trees in wetland area

Planting days for Native Perennials – Selected Wednesday afternoons 4 – 5 pm

Led by Christine Ward
1 leader + 2 volunteers for each planting day
(May 19th and 26th / June 2nd, 9th, 16th, 23rd, and 30th / July 7th and 14th
Building biodiversity with pollinator-feeding, full-sun, native perennials plugs from Helia Native Nursery

Water Quality Study Seeks Town CPA Funding

Excerpts from the CPA Application



The town is seeking \$70,000 in Community Preservation Act funding to update our Water Quality information after new improvements have significantly deterred unfiltered storm water from entering Lake Mansfield. This proposal seeks CPA funds in order to protect biodiversity, habitat, and natural resources by assessing stormwater treatment and nonpoint source pollution, this project will protect and preserve the biodiversity, habitat, and natural resources at Lake Mansfield. The lake area provides habitat for invertebrates, amphibians, fish, turtles, large mammals including bear and coyote, and birds including owls and eagles.

The proposal represents a partnership between the Town of Great Barrington and Berkshire Environmental Research Center (BERC) of Bard College at Simon's Rock (BCSR). The Town will provide administrative project and grant oversight. BERC will conduct all aspects of the research, from research design to fieldwork and data analysis. BERC has conducted research on the lakes, rivers, and wetlands of the Berkshires for over 30 years. BCSR students will conduct field work and research in classes and internships, under the technical and scientific direction of BERC staff. BCSR will provide the use of laboratories, supplies, and field equipment. Student summer internships academic year jobs will help with field and lab work. Students will be encouraged to use this

research as a springboard for additional research on Lake Mansfield or in the region for their year-long senior thesis projects.

A multi-year study is needed in order to judge the success of recent improvements in the watershed and to inform future work in the Lake Mansfield watershed, one of the most utilized open spaces in town. While there have been recent improvements in the Lake Mansfield watershed, there is a need of a study of the water quality or chemistry.

Past studies and photographic records demonstrate that nonpoint source pollution, delivering sediment and nutrients to the lake, is the primary pollutant of the lake. Sediment fills in sensitive areas along the shorelines and encourages the growth of nuisance plants. Sediment loading and the addition of nutrients through nonpoint source pollution are accelerating the eutrophication of the lake, also leading to nuisance plants and algae.

This proposal has the support of the Community Preservation Committee and will be proposed for support at the 2021 Annual Town Meeting scheduled for June 7th at 6pm.

Remembering Dr. Nina Evans, Forever a Friend to Lake Mansfield

by Christine Ward



In 2005 a small group of folks began to gather together around kitchen tables to plan ways to care for Lake Mansfield. We were spurred on by our love of the lake, a belief in public action, and a willingness to work hard and long for something that we cared deeply about. That's when I met Nina Evans— she had newly taken up permanent residence in Great Barrington and was looking for a way to give back to the community.

As described in her biography: “Nina became a physician back when only six women, including herself, were in a medical school class of 120. Thereafter she trained in psychiatry specializing in family therapy, hypnotherapy and the treatment of children with an emphasis on finding the resources and strength in people and families. While scaling back from her medical career and into retirement, Nina became more deeply involved in art making art.”

Fortunately, she also became deeply involved with our work for Lake Mansfield. Nina jumped in with both feet! In 2006 she was a founding member of the Lake Mansfield Improvement Task Force, helping to shape the efforts that we are benefitting from today.

Nina volunteered at annual Lake Days, wrote newsletter articles, battled invasive plant species, and helped to plant new trees. She and her husband Richard donated stays at their Cope Cod cottage to help raise funds at LMA Cabin Fever Fundraisers and Richard brought his jazz band to provide music at these events. Nina played an integral role in strategizing and developing the improvement and stewardship vision for Lake Mansfield.

I think that Nina gave her time and energies freely because she was so inspired by the beauty of our natural surroundings and the joy of working together with friends. She in turn inspired the rest of us with her sparkling humor and great love of the mysteries of natural science, as well as with her artwork, gardening, love of literature, and belief in good things to come.

Nina died in the summer of 2020 of a long-term illness. I feel quite certain that she continues to be with us today as we work to keep Lake Mansfield healthy and vibrant for future generations.



Swimming Group Sponsors New Bench

by Ray Zelehoski



The ice leaving the lakes of the Berkshires is the harbinger of open water swimming for the Simon's Rock Pacemakers, an affiliate of United States Masters Swimming association (USMS). At Lake Mansfield, the first plunge happens in mid May and the last lake swim of the season occurs in late October or early November. During that interval the group will swim at another dozen lakes in the tri-state area, including a number of visits back to the "home lake" Lake Mansfield.

Shortly after the Kilpatrick Athletic Center (KAC) opened in 1999, what began as a loose-knit group of fitness buffs and tri-athletes quickly became a family of aquatic training and social interaction. Now, the group meets at a pre-scheduled lake most Wednesday evenings throughout the open water season, swimming anywhere from one-half to three miles wearing buoys for visibility and potential floatation. The swimmers are accompanied by a small group of kayakers and paddle-boarders for additional safety, and after the swim everyone relaxes at the lakeside or a nearby home for a pot-luck meal and camaraderie.

The Simon's Rock Pacemakers train at the KAC pool as well as the various lakes of the area. Members of the group range from those interested in casual fitness to athletes competing in local and international events. Some members rank among the top ten both nationally and internationally, and include at least two past national champions.

Members of the group also teach swimming to adults in a series of lessons, free of charge, to anyone in the community each April (except for 2020 due to COVID). These lessons have become a national program and April has been proclaimed Adult Learn to Swim month (originally just in Massachusetts but now nationally by USMS). All of this is the brainchild of Pacemaker leader Bill Meier, currently the Athletic Director and co-manager of the KAC, as he wrote the instruction program under the auspices of USMS. Bill's warmth, positive outlook, coaching skills, and enthusiasm has had a powerful impact on every Pacemaker member. Bill often travels throughout the US to train instructors in the particular methods of teaching adults to swim. The impact on these new or improved swimmers is visible in their self confidence and newfound security in the water.

The Pacemakers also include many of the family members of the swimmers, not the least of which was Ruth Meier, Bill's mother. Ruth lived with Bill and his wife Maureen during recent years until her death in the fall of 2020. Upon her passing, the Pacemakers looked for a way to commemorate her life and celebrate Bill as the founder, head coach, and leader of this impactful program.

What better way to accomplish this than through a donation of a lakeside bench to the Lake Mansfield Alliance? We are looking forward to installing and dedicating this bench in June this year.



YOU make a big difference.

All gifts to the Great Barrington Land Conservancy help to support our work at Lake Mansfield. You can also make a dedicated donation to the Great Barrington Land Conservancy that will be used specifically for Lake Mansfield Improvements. People like you bring annual improvements to the Lake Mansfield Beach Area and Conservation Forest Trails.

Thank you 2020 Lake Mansfield Donors:

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Jo Valens

Please consider a gift today!

Volunteers are always needed:
info@GBLand.org

Thank You Ruth Meier Bench Supporters!

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GBLand.org

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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.

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

