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LAKE MANSFIELD

Newsletter of the Great Barrington Land Conservancy

"Nature is everywhere – we just need to learn to see it."

by Christine Ward, Lake Mansfield Alliance Coordinator

To see, feel, and hear nature requires a willingness to focus on what is right in front of us. As a species we have barely scratched the surface of what nature must teach us. Hearing these lessons requires relinquishing a human-centered bias. First, we must let go of our own preoccupations so that when we are outside we can truly begin to see the rich diversity and complex activity that is the basis of all natural communities.

We are a part of our natural communities and we can play an important supporting role with habitat healing and resilience. First we must learn to see what is before us. Through play, children can suspend their thoughts about past and future endeavors to experience what is here and now. So this year, I am urging you to take your own inner kid out to play each day. When walking along the lake edge or through the shady forest, pause– take a closer look – notice the workings of the living things all around you. See the trees, hear the birds, feel the wind and rain. This year Lake Mansfield Alliance's (LMA) efforts are focused on more deeply understanding the lessons nature has to teach as a way to guide our stewardship and community efforts.



Join us at our upcoming volunteer days and educational programs. To learn more about what informs the work we do, visit lakemansfield.org.

Watch Emma Marris' TedTalk "Nature is everywhere -- we just need to learn to see it" at youtu.be/hiIcwt88o94.

Final Design for Lake Mansfield Improvement Planning

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

In last year’s newsletter I had the opportunity to provide a summary of proposed improvements to Lake Mansfield Road and a tentative timeline for implementing them. I am happy to report that these plans are on schedule and the Lake Mansfield Improvement Task Force is committed to refining them even further through both internal development and community discussion.

Working with a team of engineers and landscape architects (paid for with Town Community Preservation Act funds and Mass DEP storm water mitigation design funds), the Task Force completed its “25% design” phase last spring. These plans were shared at Task Force meetings, an online community survey, and on the Lake Mansfield website. On-site walking tour signage illustrated proposed improvements at key locations along the road. The feedback we received prompted additional refinements during the summer and fall of 2021, and in December we hosted a virtual community meeting to share the revised plans.



The basics of the improvement plan remains as earlier stated. A new donated playground will be installed. The lake outlet pipe will be supplemented and the road raised to eliminate flooding. The beach area will feature gently sloping paths for handicapped accessibility. The main parking lot will be enlarged and will be designed to capture and treat stormwater runoff. Finally, the road itself will be closed to vehicular traffic and transformed into a recreation path while the bank will be stabilized and planted with native vegetation.

With all of these aspects on their way to be finalized, the Task Force is now focusing on finer details regarding pavement type, species of plants, and the location and design of benches and signs. In response to climate change concerns, planted areas and permeable surfaces have been designed to filter stormwater runoff. Water from increasingly strong summer storms will be cleaned before it enters the lake.



The stakes are high— the designs we implement must meet the community's needs for many years to come.

Places like the Lake Mansfield Recreation Area are critically important to any community, as climate and economic shocks make it harder for the elderly and for families with children to find welcoming public places. The fact that Lake Mansfield is a free, accessible recreation area located centrally within Great Barrington makes it a welcoming space to a variety of people of all ages and backgrounds. To better serve the entire community, our plans include accessible pathways to provide healthy outdoor locations, resting places for viewing wildlife, plenty of trees and vegetation to provide shade, and opportunities for gathering, recreation, and cooling off.

Two important upcoming studies will inform this work. We have begun a three-year water quality monitoring project in partnership with Bard College at Simon's Rock. This coming summer we will engage aquatic biologists to conduct a study of the vegetation in the lake and update our lake management plans including invasive weed control.

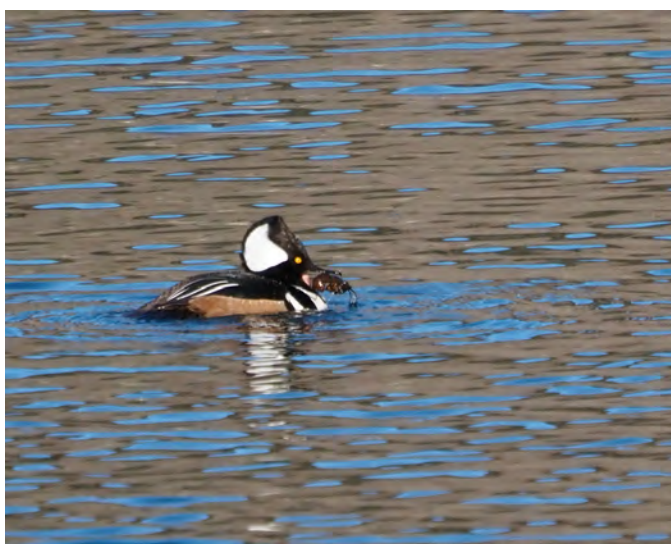
This spring the Town will apply to the state's Municipal Vulnerability Program (MVP) for funds for the construction of some of these long planned improvements and, as the features of our design intersect with the MVP program goals, we believe our proposal will be very competitive. Today we stand ready with updated plans near to 75% complete. We are ready to begin the important process of applying for permits from local and state environmental agencies and seeking grants to fund the construction phases of the project. **It is our hope that funds will be in place to begin construction in the calendar year of 2023, and perhaps next year's newsletter will feature a construction timeline!**

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



Lake Mansfield is a Birding Hot Spot

by Greg Ward with photos by John Felton



Lake Mansfield is uniquely suited for all birders. Several habitats can be observed from accessible trails along the lake edge and within the forest.

Let's begin at the boat ramp— from here you can look for waterfowl during spring or fall migration. Several species can be found resting on the lake including Common Merganser, Ring-necked Duck, Bufflehead, Pied-billed Grebe and, of course, Canada Geese. When you look to your left at the nearby wetland shrubs you might catch sight of a Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Yellow-rumped Warbler, or White-breasted Nuthatch. Each bird species is adapted to these specific adjacent habitats to meet their feeding, resting, and nesting needs.

The lakeside trail offers a distinctive habitat of tall trees near the water's edge. We might catch sight of the Eastern Kingbird, a large flycatcher that is black above with a clean white breast and belly. Note the white edge at the bottom of its tail, which is a distinguishing field mark. Typically Kingbirds will often fly out from the treetops to capture insects and then return to perch. Don't forget to look to the skies! You might see a soaring Bald Eagle, Osprey, Red-tailed Hawk, Tree Swallow, or Chimney Swift.



While walking along the water's edge you can listen to the chorus of several woodland species, especially in the mornings and evenings. Many birders identify hidden birds by their calls and songs. Perhaps you will hear Red-eyed Vireo, Black-and-white Warbler, Tufted Titmouse, or Ovenbird— all birds with clear and easily recognizable songs. A helpful app for beginning birders, Merlin provides photos that illustrate field marks and includes recordings of songs and calls for each bird species.



One hundred and thirty-one bird species have been recorded as seen at Lake Mansfield!

Consider contributing your sightings to the Ebird list. Your birding data will become part of the shared global effort to map bird ranges. If you would like to learn more, join us for our May Guided Birding Walk.

Birding Resources:

Merlin Bird ID: <https://merlin.allaboutbirds.org/>

eBird – The Cornell Lab of Ornithology:
<https://ebird.org/home>

Lake Mansfield Hotspot Bird Species List:
<https://ebird.org/hotspot/L4505754>

When we arrive at the northern end of the lake the habitat diversifies into a canopy of tall trees, an open understory area, a substantial shrubby buffer of willow, dogwood, and alder, and a small marsh of cattails and other wetland plants. This area attracts migrating birds in the spring and fall and a variety of breeding species throughout the spring and summer, so be on the lookout for Red-winged Blackbird, Common Grackle, Warbling Vireo, and Chestnut-sided Warbler. Another favorite for many is the Baltimore Oriole which builds its pendulous nest in deciduous trees and has been consistently observed here during the breeding season. If you have time, consider moving on into the forest.

The forest trail system offers easy walking along a ¼ mile loop trail within a mature woodland. Three thrush species can be heard here, each with a distinctive and melodious song. Listen for the Eastern Wood Peewee, a flycatcher that has a unique song that reminds us of its name: “PEEE WEEE!”. Tall trees provide the habitats favored by Piliated, Hairy, and Downy Woodpecker as well as White Breasted Nuthatch and Black-capped Chickadee. Sharp-eyed birders will spot the Brown-creeper, a small well-camouflaged bird that can be seen creeping up the trunks of trees. These forest birds are among many of the year-long avian residents.



Sunday MAY 22nd – 7:30 AM
Guided Birding Walk at Lake Mansfield
Grab your binoculars and join Greg Ward
Meet at the Lake Mansfield Beach Area
Register at: www.GBLand.org

Creating a Plant Inventory for Lake Mansfield

by Devan Arnold, Landscape Designer at Sassafrass Land Care, LLC



With the sun shining and a pleasant breeze whispering through the trees it is the perfect time to enjoy a walk along the shores of one of Great Barrington's finest treasures: Lake Mansfield. A five minute drive from the bustle of downtown, the lake dazzles the eye and captivates the inquisitive mind with an array of plants and animals (particularly birds) that any nature enthusiast would be hard pressed not to appreciate. Strolling peacefully along the water's edge, you are greeted by charming botanical characters, from the diminutive Monkey Flower (*Mimulus ringens*) to the mighty Cottonwood tree (*Populus deltoides*), and with all manner and sizes of plants in between.

This unique community of plants that thrives where the water and land meet is the focus of a very exciting upcoming project sponsored by the Great Barrington Land Conservancy. Local plant professionals and a small group of volunteers will conduct a botanical species assessment along Lake Mansfield Road in the early to mid summer. They will catalog the variety of species that make up Lake Mansfield's ecological community. The assessment will record the beneficial native plant species to be encouraged

in future endeavors as well as the undesirable invasive plant species which will necessitate future management and control.

The results of this survey will be an invaluable tool in moving forward with efforts to restore and improve the ecological integrity of our beloved lake. The existing plants that call the lake home are time-tested for being able to successfully cope with challenging conditions. Perhaps even more importantly they are critical community members of the local ecology, supporting interrelated birds, insects, mammals, amphibians, and reptiles. The completed survey will provide future planners and designers with a guide to the appropriate species integral to our lake conditions and ecosystem.

Volunteer Opportunity

Looking for botanically-minded individuals with identification experience to assist with surveying plants along the Lake Mansfield Road shoreline. Plant surveys will be conducted in early to mid summer over 2-3 sessions and will be led by a plant professional. For more information, visit www.GBLand.org.

Battling Water Chestnut

by Dale Abrams, Naturalist and GBLC Board Member



Image: Perkiomen Watershed Conservancy

What is natural to Lake Mansfield? This is a complex question, as over the past 12-15 thousand years many new species of plants and animals have undoubtedly made their way to the shallow lake and put down roots. Today the lake is home to roughly two dozen species of aquatic plants, each with their own origins and history.

Plants that arrived here centuries ago and spread throughout our region are known as native, while those that were accidentally or intentionally introduced recently from other regions are called non-native. Non-native invasive plants are those that outcompete native plants and negatively affect diversity.

Our tiny lake is no stranger to this phenomenon, as the pace of change and introduction of new species has accelerated dramatically along with the explosion of global commerce in the past century. Many introduced species now inhabit the lake and surrounding shoreline, and modern stewardship often involves being vigilant for non-native species that can easily become invasive. GBLC's Lake Mansfield volunteers have alerted the town and conservation commission to several invasive species like Eurasian Milfoil and Phragmites Reed Grass, important steps, in what is undoubtedly an ongoing task for lake lovers and stewards.

Recently, lake paddlers noticed a small patch of European Water Chestnut on the northwest end of the lake. The innocuous looking invasive forms dense floating mats on the lake's surface that can easily displace native species and interfere with recreational activities. Originally from Eurasia, the Water Chestnut was introduced in 1897 to aquatic gardens in Cambridge, MA, and by the turn of the century had already begun spreading throughout lakes and rivers in the northeast United States. One acre of Water Chestnut can produce enough seeds in a single season to cover 100 acres the following year, and the spiky nut-like seeds can remain viable for up to seven years, so ongoing monitoring and control effort is vital.

You can help!

Lake Mansfield volunteers submitted documentation to our local conservation commission this past summer and received a green light to move forward in controlling this plant through hand pulling beginning as soon as they emerge in spring. Please let us know if you'd like to bring a boat and lend a hand with stewardship efforts this year and beyond. Please visit www.GBLand.org to get involved.



Image: Mystic River Watershed Association

Source:
 "Water Chestnut: An Exotic Invasive Aquatic Plant."
 Michelle Robinson, MA Department of Conservation
 and Recreation. October 2002. [https://
 www.mass.gov/doc/water-chestnut-0/download](https://www.mass.gov/doc/water-chestnut-0/download)

Connecting Kids to Nature: Summer Programs for Families

by Tammis Coffin & Christine Ward



Lake Mansfield Nature Explorers Club

Young people and their adults are invited to join the brand new Lake Mansfield Nature Explorers Club this summer for a series of experience-based meet-ups to explore and connect with the natural world through games, science and art. The club meets Saturday mornings (9:30 -11:30am) from June 25 to July 30 at Lake Mansfield Beach and Forest. The club is geared towards school age children (ages 7-12).

Registration is required at www.GBLand.org and group size is limited. The free program is funded through the Lake Mansfield Alliance, a project of Great Barrington Land Conservancy.

Lake Mansfield Community Sketchbook

As a special invitation to the community, we will post weekly sketching challenges from The Nature Explorer's Sketchbook by Jean Mackay on the bulletin board at Lake Mansfield during the month of July. Sketchbooks will be available for kids who join the Nature Explorers Club at www.GBLand.org!

Keeping a nature journal or sketchbook helps you see things you didn't notice before. All you really need is a notebook and a pencil, crayons, markers, or colored pencils, plus a few helpful tips from Jean Mackay.

We can't wait to see what you discover along our forest paths and lake shores! Send us photos of your drawings at info@lakemansfield.org.



Family Program of Abenaki Songs & Stories

Coming to Lake Mansfield on June 29 are Abenaki storytellers Joseph and James Bruchac. Families with school age children are warmly welcome to join this special Wednesday afternoon program (4-5pm) to hear traditional tales of Native peoples that focus on our relationship with the natural world.

This event has a limited group size and priority will be given to those signed up for Nature Explorers. Registration is required at www.GBLand.org.

*When you feel this land
when you taste this land
when you hold this land
as your lungs hold your breath*

*you will be the rattlesnake
always embracing earth with her passage,
you will be the salmon, a chant whipped
through the ripple,
you will be the deermouse,
small feet stitching the night,
you will be the bear,
thunder held in soft steps,
when your songs see this land
when your ears sing this land
you will be this land
you will be this land.*

- Joseph Bruchac excerpt from his poem,
"NDAKINNA - Our Land"



Celebrating a Decade of Yoga At Lake Mansfield by Senta Reis

This spring marks the 10th year we have been offering yoga on the lawn at Lake Mansfield. It all started as a shared idea between myself and Christine Ward at the annual spring clean-up. Year by year it has grown into a lovely group of folks who enjoy yoga outdoors in this beautiful setting. Our companions often include Canadian geese, bellowing bullfrogs, chirping songbirds, bald eagles and osprey soaring overhead, and many other sweet inhabitants. These creatures, along with the sparkling lake, beautiful skies, and lush vegetation, deeply nourish us as we practice yoga.

The practice has always been donation-based and the certified instructors are committed to offering clear instruction with modifications available to accommodate any level of experience or fitness.



A portion of the fees collected goes to Lake Mansfield Alliance. The practice is open on a drop-in basis, no pre-registration is required. Participants are encouraged to bring a large blanket to practice on and an additional blanket or towel to use as a prop when needed. Dress for the weather, only pouring rain or thunderstorms cause class to be canceled.

We invite you to join us on Saturdays at 9am during May, June, September, and October. During July and August practice is on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 8am. (Saturdays are too busy during the summer.) For updated information on any changes or cancellations due to weather, we use our Facebook page "Yoga on Lake Mansfield" to post updates. We also post to the Facebook Great Barrington Community Board.

Beyond the Buoys!

Pacemakers Swim Ahead to Support Lake Mansfield

by Bill Meier, Pacemaker Leader
with photos by Alfredo Sosa

This summer the Simon's Rock Pacemakers, an affiliate of United States Masters Swimming association (USMS), will be hosting Beyond the Buoys, an open water swim celebration at Lake Mansfield.

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.

The event will start at 8:00 a.m. on Sunday, June 26 with a clinic offering tips on how to safely enjoy swimming longer distances in open water. The day will start with an Open Water Swim Clinic followed by three swims— a kids "Splash and Dash", a shorter swim for less confident swimmers to the triangle rock, and then a longer 1/2 mile swim for those who are more competitive.

All swimmers and their families are welcome to join in and make a splash at Lake Mansfield! Go to www.GBLand.org for details and registration information. Funds raised from this event will be donated to Lake Mansfield Alliance, a project of Great Barrington Land Conservancy.





Family and donors commemorate installation of Ruth Meier Memorial Bench.

Thank You 2021 Lake Mansfield Donors!

Dale and Alison Abrams
Robert and Donna Boyer
Roselle and Alan Chartock
Josh & Meredith Clarin
Leigh Davis
Sarah Dinan
Pamela Drumm
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Richard and Sharon Feldstein Hans
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Scott Smith III
Laura Stephen
Mary G. Stephen
Jo Valens
Franklin Walton

**Lake Mansfield is a project of Great Barrington Land Conservancy.
Donations dedicated to Lake Mansfield fuel the work we accomplish each year.**

YOU make a big difference.

2022 Lake Mansfield Volunteer Workdays

Joyful Work is Invigorating and Satisfying!

Register at www.GBLand.org. Volunteers should come with work gloves and water bottles and an eagerness to lend a hand!



You can help care for the forest. You can help spruce up the beach area. You can help to maintain trails.

Forest and Trails – April 30th, 9:30-11:30

Led by Christine Ward, Brad Roblin, and Kate Ritter
Collect litter
Remove invasive species
Trail needs inventory

Beach Area I - Saturday May 14th, 9:30 -11:30

Beach Area II – Saturday May 21st, 9:30 – 11:30

Led by Christine Ward, Brad Roblin, and Kate Ritter
Big push to sand and paint picnic tables
Mulch Trees and Shrubs
Help prepare beach area for swimming

Habitat Inventory – Dates and Times to be announced

Led by Devan Arnold
Help create a plant list that will inform future rehabilitation efforts.
Join a botanically minded team of volunteers to identify native plants thriving in our lake habitat.

Water Chestnut Removal - Date and Time to be Determined

Led by Dale Abrams
Hand-pulling and removing invasive plants

GREAT BARRINGTON LAND CONSERVANCY



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.