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LAKE MANSFIELD

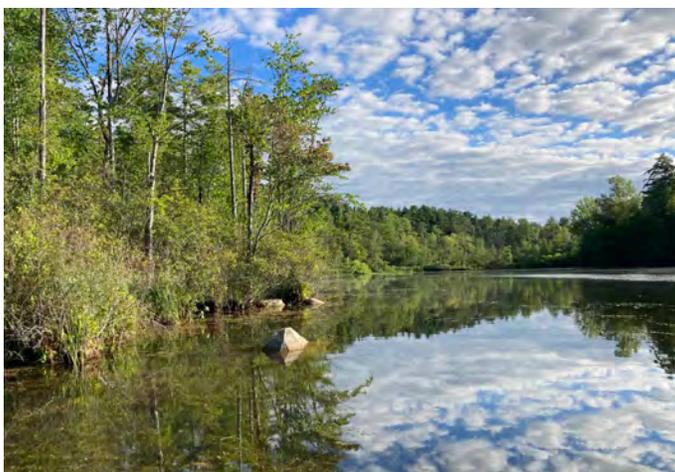
Newsletter of the Great Barrington Land Conservancy

Caring for Lake and Community

by Christine Ward, Lake Mansfield Alliance Coordinator

For well over 20 years our community has been committed to caring for Lake Mansfield. When we move through the landscape at the lake's edge we experience the same sun, sky, and water that sustains the wildlife there— and we feel connected.

Have you seen children biking, teenagers fishing, and grandparents walking along the shores of Lake Mansfield? What will it be like a decade from now? Each of us has a role to play and our efforts move far beyond our own enjoyment and time. Our work must be multi-generational.



This year I welcome the opportunity to introduce Kate and Brad Roblin as project leaders for Lake Mansfield Alliance. Their vitality and love for the lake, the forest, and the trails have already gained them the support and involvement of many steadfast stewards, and they look to the future to engage and inspire others. Their energy is infectious. With Kate and Brad at the helm we will strive to safeguard this patch of thriving wildness and to secure resiliency, beauty, and health for the future.

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

Home Stretch for Lake Mansfield Improvement Planning

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

Where are we in the process? In 2022 the Improvement Plan design was modified to include a stronger drainage solution for the whale rock area and to enhance connectivity between an adjacent vernal pool and the lake. The plans are now 100% complete and ready for permitting consideration. Early this spring these engineering designs will be submitted by the town to the Conservation Commission and Army Corp of Engineers. Following the permitting approval, the entire project will be put out to bid and a construction timeline will be established.

The basics of the improvement plan remain as stated in last year’s newsletter. 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 designed to capture and treat stormwater runoff. Finally, the section of road from the boat launch to the beach area will be closed to vehicular traffic and transformed into a recreation path while the bank will be stabilized and planted with native vegetation.



The improvement plan itself is also currently being strengthened by three habitat studies as well as multi-year volunteer efforts. In 2022 Geosyntec Consultants completed a Lake Mansfield Aquatic Vegetation Survey which provided detailed information about the composition and distribution of the lake’s plant community. Supplementing this, a 3-year Water Quality Study in partnership with Bard College at Simon’s Rock will be completed this year. The study will aid lake management planning efforts as well as meet the town’s community outreach goals by engaging students in the water quality sampling and testing.

Meanwhile community volunteers rallied by the Great Barrington Land Conservancy have completed a native plant inventory and are engaged in a multi-year effort to eradicate water chestnut, an aggressive invasive weed that was discovered in 2021. All of these efforts will guide the landscape design of the rehabilitation areas.



Simon’s Rock interns collect water samples for study.

We are coming into the home stretch—Final designs, permitting, funding, and community input are crucial to implementing the Improvement Plan.

Where will the funding come from? The project cost is estimated to be \$1.3 million. In 2022 the town applied to the state’s Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness program and was awarded \$992,500. With the final designs and a construction timeline secured, the town will apply this spring for a Mass DEP 319 Program Nonpoint Source Stormwater Mitigation grant for the additional funding needed to complete the project. Past funding through this program has paid for costly stormwater drainage improvements implemented on Castle Hill Avenue and Knob Hill Road. Our environmentally-centered improvement plan, ongoing water and aquatic plant studies, and committed community engagement will make us strong candidates for this competitive grant funding.



Come play! The new playground donated by the Shoval family is open and ready for all to enjoy.

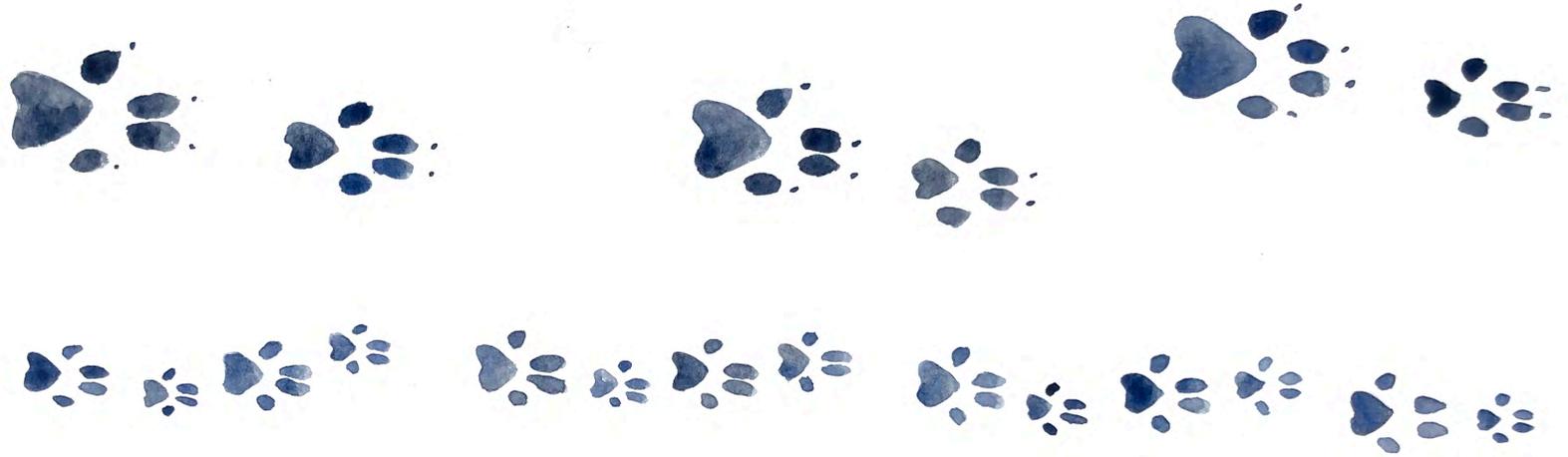
Get involved! Lake Mansfield Improvement Task Force meetings are open to all. Visit townofgb.org/lake-mansfield-improvement-task-force for more information about upcoming meetings.

What will be happening this summer? The community will be able to enjoy the recreational area, newly installed playground, and conservation trails throughout the summer. Fall 2023 is the earliest possible time for beginning construction. In the meantime we will be reaching out to inform the community about future changes. Upcoming disruptions to recreation might be necessary and will be carefully planned for. Working together, we will be taking the final steps needed to protect and celebrate the lake’s natural habitat as well as to create a recreational area that will serve our entire community for decades to come.

Lake Mansfield's Wild Side

by Dale Abrams, Naturalist and GBLC Board Member

Illustrations by Elizabeth Orenstein



There is a peacefulness in strolling down the path along Lake Mansfield Road, in watching waves ripple the lake surface, and in marking the seasons in the foliage changes. This calm belies the deeper importance of Lake Mansfield's wild side. Ice skaters and paddlers who explore the western shore of the lake can find at least half a dozen camouflaged muskrat lodges nestled at the base of alder and wild rose bushes. The lodges are built from mounds of mud and soft plant material like cattails leaves. Muskrats aren't the only creatures dependent on this undeveloped area. When a thin layer of snow coats the frozen lake, fox, coyote, and bobcat tracks can be found, revealing that this side of the lake is wild indeed.



Just over a year ago Lake Mansfield Alliance members were invited by a Simon's Rock student to explore a small trail leading from the college campus to the lake's edge. We had barely begun walking when our snowy path was criss-crossed by cottontail rabbit and red fox tracks. In our excitement we dashed from track to track, working to identify the creatures that made them, when a slight movement in the woods at the lake's edge caught our attention. We looked up and spotted a lone coyote watching us before trotting slowly south along through the woods. Quickly and quietly, we sped to the spot where the coyote stood moments before. We discovered a trail loaded with coyote prints! The path, tucked out of sight about 75 feet back from the shore, was heavily traveled. This concentration of footprints told us we were probably a short distance from a coyote family's den. We have also received reports of high-pitched barks and yips and sightings of coyotes crossing the frozen lake in twilight hours.

Lake Mansfield and the surrounding undeveloped woodlands and wetlands are home to a myriad of wildlife. The importance of this natural area cannot be overstated. Lake Mansfield is a place where people and wildlife catch glimpses of one another, finding quiet and solace away from the busier parts of Great Barrington.

Protecting Star-filled Skies

by Dale Abrams, Naturalist and GBLC Board Member

The shoreline path at Lake Mansfield is a peaceful spot to look out into the heavens. On a winter's night the darkness comes early and countless stars, planets, and even rare comets can be seen. On the new walkway many people can now enjoy an evening stroll while gazing at the night sky. But there's a subtle yet important threat posed by electric lights.

You may have experienced how newer and brighter LED and halogen headlights can irritate your eyes while driving during the day or at night. Bright lights make our pupils contract and reduce our natural ability to see in low light. Ironically, more light makes us worse at seeing in the dark. Ambient light around Lake Mansfield has the same effect, making it harder to see stars and planets. This light comes from distant sources like Catamount Ski Area and nearby sources like street lights and our homes.

For example, ideal exterior house lighting would be on a motion sensor or a timer with a shielded fixture so you don't see the bulb, angled so light shines downward and not outward, and the bulb would be warm toned to avoid the blue end of the color spectrum. While driving at Lake Mansfield turn your car headlights to low beams, especially when approaching walkers.

We hope you'll get the chance to enjoy the night sky at Lake Mansfield and view one of the springtime constellations. Please consider making changes to reduce the lighting that your home contributes to our lake environment for the benefit of people and wildlife who depend on this precious natural area. Learn more about how and why it's important to protect dark night skies through International Dark Sky Association (www.darksky.org).



You can make a big difference in protecting dark night skies!

To minimize the harmful effects of light pollution:

- Only light the areas that need illumination.
- Turn off lights when not needed.
- Direct lighting downward.
- Choose dimmer light bulbs that are warm toned.

Volunteers Spotlight

by Christine Ward

Lake Mansfield volunteers have been steadfast, joyful, and committed for the long haul. They have given thousands of hours of service to provide the community with the spaces we all enjoy. Over the years volunteers have planted trees, installed split-rail fences and kiosks, built and cared for forest trails, and served on the many committees that are involved in overseeing the lake and forest.



2022 volunteers in action. For the complete photo gallery visit GBLand.org.



May 2021, Ron and Sharon Dlugosz. Thoughtful improvement takes time- long term volunteers make that possible.

Ron and Sharon Dlugosz have been exemplar volunteers. Ron’s commitment to the preservation and care of Lake Mansfield was reflected in his service as LMA leader, selectboard member, and Lake Mansfield Improvement Task Force Member. Since 2005, Ron and Sharon have shown up with the skills and tools needed to get the job done. They were essential to the building of the Conservation Forest Bridge and Boardwalk in 2009. They haven’t missed a volunteer day in 20 years. This year our friends will be moving away from their home on the lake’s edge. We will miss seeing Ron fishing for trout and Sharon jogging around the lake. We wish them well as they join their new community. We promise to care for the spaces they have loved.



Greenagers Trail Crew

by Christine Ward

There is magic to how trail work transforms our local youth. Through its paid employment programs, internships, and apprenticeships, Greenagers gives teens and young adults meaningful work in environmental conservation, sustainable farming, natural resource management, and vocational skills building. These hard-working young people practice and master skills that allow them to develop a clear sense of their own capabilities. Most trail projects have a tipping point when the job seems nearly impossible, and it takes teamwork and self-discipline to persevere. The joy of accomplishing challenging work is an invaluable experience of self-empowerment.

Each year we hire Greenagers to help care for the Lake Mansfield Conservation Forest Trails. Their outstanding work has helped keep our trails in tip-top shape and added many needed improvements. Crews have installed new trail surfacing and bog bridges, helped to complete the accessible trail bed in the loop trail, weeded trail edges, trimmed shrubs and trees, and battled invasive species.

Last year we hired Greenagers to manage summer foliage and resurface eroded trail areas. This year, with support from our donors, Greenagers will be repairing the bridge-boardwalk in the spring and returning in the summer for trail work and forest management. Thank you Greenagers for training the next generation of Lake Mansfield stewards and keeping our trails safe for years to come.

Water Chestnut Monitoring

by Dale Abrams

Last year 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. 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.

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 (abramsdale@gmail.com) if you are interested in lending a hand.



You can help!

Lake Mansfield volunteers are needed to remove this plant by hand pulling 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 to get involved.

Summer Programs at Lake Mansfield



Wild Edibles Walk-About

On Saturday May 20th from 2-3:30pm join naturalist and wild edibles enthusiast Arianna Alexandra Collins for a walk-about at Lake Mansfield. Come learn about in season wild edible and medicinal plants and how to identify and prepare them. Particular attention will be given to the maligned but nutritious and delicious nettle. Trailside nibbling will be encouraged and samples will be provided along with recipes. Space is limited to 16 participants. To register visit www.GBLand.org

Learn more about Arianna's work at: <https://offeringsforcommunitybuilding.com/wild-edibles/>

Bluegrass at the Lake: Special Summer Fundraiser

Mark your calendars! On Sunday, August 27, come by Lake Mansfield for an afternoon fundraiser to celebrate community and the surrounding natural areas we love. Locally sourced food will be available and the event will 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!





FronD by FronD: Finding and Identifying Ferns

Join Christine Ward and fellow fern enthusiasts on Saturday July 8th from 9:30 to 11:30 AM to seek and identify fern species in the Lake Mansfield Conservation Forest. We will meet at the beach area and then dive into the forest to gather ferns. With identification guides at hand, we will look more closely at their differentiating characteristics that will lead to their scientific names. Come learn with us and help us begin a forest inventory for one of our most treasured spaces. Preregister online at GBLand.org, group size is limited.



Yoga at Lake Mansfield Presents a Special Event! by Senta Rafaela

Join us for a summer solstice celebration with yoga and a live sound bath on Saturday June 17th from 8-10 AM at Lake Mansfield. Free, no preregistration is necessary. Donations accepted. Bring a yoga blanket and a large towel. Rain date is Sunday June 18th.

Breathe out into summer's blossoming beauty, experience simple enlivening movement, then rest and sink into soothing sounds and songs interacting with nature. Hand pans, singing bowls, drone flute, and voice presented by Senta Rafaela. Bird song, frogs, butterflies, bees and dragonflies provided by Mother Nature.

Potluck refreshments will follow the celebration. Please bring something simple and fresh to share!

For more information about weekly yoga classes at Lake Mansfield visit GBLand.org. For updated information, changes, or cancellations due to weather, please visit the Facebook page "Yoga on Lake Mansfield."



BRIDGE Event with Berkshire Balance Center

by Brad Roblin

This summer, Berkshire Balance Center will provide a guided experience through the Lake Mansfield trails for Multicultural BRIDGE community members. The event will begin with an immersive nature walk led by a certified Kripalu Mindful Outdoor Guide. Participants will also take part in a yoga based movement practice appropriate for all levels and ages. Finally, attendees will learn and practice skills to help with nervous system regulation and stress management. The backdrop of Lake Mansfield and the surrounding forest will provide a serene and inspiring setting. Date and time to be determined... please keep watch for scheduling announcements!



2022 Kids in Multicultural Bridge's Happiness Toolbox Summer Program exploring Lake Mansfield Forest.

Meet Tom Tying'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 Tying 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.

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.



Larry the Turtle photo by Tammis Coffin.



Thank you 2022 Lake Mansfield Donors!

Robert and Donna Boyer
 Roselle and Alan Chartock
 Sharon Coleman and Nelson Wyman
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 Jo Valens
 Frank Walton
 Christine and Greg Ward in honor of
 Ron and Sharon Dlugosz
 Susan Witt

Lake Mansfield is a project of Great Barrington Land Conservancy.

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

PO Box 987 Great Barrington, MA 01230

2023 Lake Mansfield Volunteer Workdays

Joyful Work is Invigorating and Satisfying!

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



Saturday, May 6, 9:30-11:30 – Beach Area I

Led by Kate and Brad Roblin with Christine Ward
2 Leaders + 8 Volunteers
Litter clean-up
Clean outside of garbage/recycle containers
Repaint tops of picnic tables

Saturday, May 20, 9:30-11:30 – Beach Area II

Led by Kate and Brad Roblin with Christine Ward
2 Leaders + 8 Volunteers
Litter clean-up
Mulching of trees and shrubs in beach area
Planting of annuals

Saturday, June 10, 9:30-11:30 – Forest and Trails

Led by Kate and Brad Roblin with Christine Ward
2 Leaders + 8 Volunteers
Litter clean-up
Clearing limbs
Invasives removal

Water Chestnut Removal

Led by Dale Abrams
Date and time to be determined
Visit GBLand.org for more information

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.