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LAKE MANSFIELD

Newsletter of the Great Barrington Land Conservancy

Free and Welcoming Access for All

by Christine Ward, Lake Mansfield Coordinator

More people are visiting Lake Mansfield than ever before! Let's say hello to the people that are new and the people we know as a small step towards building a resilient community.

The deep cold this winter provided smooth solid ice for everyone to enjoy freestyle skating and ice hockey. An early spring chorus of spring peepers and wood frogs is serenading folks strolling down the new shoreline trail. While our world is becoming increasingly stratified, free community spaces like Lake Mansfield provide invaluable opportunities for breaking down barriers. When we rest, play, and work together in a healthy and supportive environment, new connections are made and new understandings are possible.

Here, the sky, water, plants, and wildlife sustain us all. Here, the stewards of the past enable the volunteers of tomorrow. Here, everyone is welcome.

At Lake Mansfield we can take heart in the work that we are doing together for our community and environment. At Lake Mansfield we can also find the beauty and peace needed to gather our strength for the challenges ahead.



Lake Mansfield Rainbow photo by Larry Frankel.

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

Community Driven Improvements

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

The improvements at our beloved Lake Mansfield are nearly complete. Thanks to the highly successful construction that took place in the spring and fall of 2024, and to an inspiring community tree-planting event in November, we have just a few finishing touches to accomplish this spring. This comprehensive project was funded by two large grants from the state's Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) program, as well as the Town of Great Barrington's capital funds and Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds.

On your next visit to the lake, take a moment to appreciate the water quality engineering masterpiece we have accomplished. The large retention area within the expanded and regraded parking lot collects and filters stormwater runoff. This prevents water contamination, protects water quality, and diverts the filtered water to newly planted native trees which will provide cooling shade for people as well as habitat for wildlife. Improvements at the outlet stream culvert will keep the lake level relatively constant and prevent road flooding. The culvert was designed to restore and maintain terrestrial and aquatic connectivity sufficient to maintain healthy ecosystems and wildlife populations.

Between the new lakeside trail and the lake, our enlarged buffer zone of native trees and shrubs provides stormwater filtration and a stabilized bank. The trail slopes gently away from the lake in most areas, ensuring that runoff is captured by the roadside wetlands and filtered before entering the lake.



Chris Rembold (center) sites tree stakes to mark out new tree locations with the help of GBLC volunteers Alison and Dale Abrams.

Under the road, additional culverts and stone filtration beds allow water to move freely and prevent frost heaves from breaking up the path. Many visitors enjoyed our lakeside trail throughout the winter although at times walking on the path was difficult due to snow and ice. We will have to determine how best to address that challenge. The good news for the lake is that for the first time in decades there was no salt used on the road.



Simon's Rock student Liam Coote collects water samples.

This past November, the Lake Mansfield Improvement Task Force attended an excellent presentation of a three-year (2021-2024) water quality monitoring study that was recently completed by students from Bard College at Simon's Rock. The students found that the stormwater improvements made over the past decade on Castle Hill, Knob Hill, and the boat launch are working. Sediment, nitrogen, and phosphorus have all decreased. The students also compared the recent data to data collected in the 1980s and 1990s and concluded that the lake's pH and temperature is rising over time. We await the students' final report this spring to see what conclusions may be drawn from these trends and how to plan for the future stewardship of the lake.

The recreation area was busy all summer and fall with a broad range of visitors enjoying the accessible trails and beach area. We also saw our diverse community gathered at GBLC Bluegrass celebration in August, and at the GBLC community tree planting event in November when long-time volunteers were joined by new stewards of all ages. It is heartwarming to see so many people at the lake again.

Parks are for Everyone

by Jovanina Pagano, Community Liaison

The Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness grant also funded the creation of a Community Liaison team—Jovanina Pagano and Sylvana Proaño—who have been working to ensure that our whole community, in all of its rich diversity, can be in relationship with Lake Mansfield, the surrounding land, and each other. This is an intrinsically wonderful thing, and we know that open spaces like Lake Mansfield are the fertile ground where families and individuals can make the connections that are the key to community health and resilience.

Jovanina and Sylvana began with some questions: Do all community members even know that Lake Mansfield exists? Who’s missing and why? Do folks who use it feel a sense of ownership and feel safe going there?

Some concrete efforts led by the Community Liaison team included a “Spring into Summer” community dinner in May of 2024. Chris Rembold presented general information about Lake Mansfield and its recent improvements to a diverse group of community members. Folks shared stories about their most beloved outdoor spaces (one was in Port au Prince, Haiti) and asked about the possibilities of fishing, hiking, and camping at the Lake.



Years of improvements to the Lake Mansfield Recreational Area are nearly complete. The road has been moved farther from the beach area and measures have been taken to mitigate traffic and runoff into the lake, making it a cleaner and more accessible recreation area. Ben Garver, The Berkshire Eagle, Friday, June 28, 2024.



Drawing by two Eisner Camp summer employees.

Last July, the Community Liaison team was at the lake to welcome folks upon its re-opening with ice cream and an invitation to share stories about their relationship to Lake Mansfield and any meaningful experiences they’ve had — in conversation or visually through art (see above). Our goal is to continue these types of efforts across the community for the good of our people and our parks.

A huge thank you to everyone who has been involved in planning, designing, tree planting, and celebrating at Lake Mansfield these past few years. Now, we urge you to keep in mind that our parks play critical roles as places to play, relax, exercise, and find peace.

We all need these places, no matter where we come from, and no matter what kind of day we are having. Indeed the questions that the Community Liaison team began with are even more critical at this moment. Some members of our community are now fearful in the same spaces that just last year were treasured places to bring their children, relax, and have fun. We must continue to welcome people to places like Lake Mansfield.

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

Taking Local Action: Lake Mansfield Community Planting



Photo by Stephanie Zollshan, The Berkshire Eagle, 2004.



At Lake Mansfield we have created a powerful collaboration to secure a healthy vibrant lake ecosystem for future generations. Last November's community planting day is a shining example of how we are connecting community volunteers, the town of Great Barrington, and local businesses. On Saturday November 12th, 2024 we gathered over 35 volunteers to plant and water trees and shrubs. The volunteers, ranging from ages 12 to 70+, donated over 92 hours to complete this massive undertaking. It was a tremendous day of community action where folks of all ages worked together side by side.

One team of volunteers pitched in to plant 250 native tree saplings between the new parking lot and the Lake Mansfield Conservation Forest. The trees were provided by Helia Native Nursery through their 2024 Carbon Offset Program, which enabled contributors to offset their annual carbon emissions.

The second team of volunteers planted trees and shrubs between the lake and the new Lake Mansfield shoreline trail. Ward's Nursery and Garden Center donated 38 mature native trees. In addition, Helia Native Nursery provided the 170 plantlings that they had propagated from whips that were harvested by volunteers along the shore of Lake Mansfield in March of 2024. These plantlings include native willows, dogwoods, and wild roses.





Great Barrington Liason Sylvana Proano on the left, Great Barrington Liason Jovanina Pagano center, and Jonathon Williams, co-owner of Helia Native Nursery, on the right.

Both Greg Ward, owner of Ward's Nursery and Garden Center, and Bridghe McCracken, founder of Helia Native Nursery, (pictured right) grew up next to Lake Mansfield. Their childhood love of the lake has evolved and deepened during their lives. These early connections made them eager to be a part of this restoration project.

The Town of Great Barrington's completion of the Lake Mansfield Improvement project has ensured the protection of the lake's water quality and improved accessibility. Thanks to the strength and generosity of our community, we have begun the restoration of the lake and forest habitats in the areas disturbed by the water quality engineering. In total, the value of this collaboration project can be conservatively estimated at \$21,454.14. But the greater value of our work at Lake Mansfield is the fostering of lifelong connections to our precious natural spaces. It is important to understand that there is a great deal of work left to be done. The next efforts must continue to focus on our long-term commitment to habitat restoration.



Greg Ward (left), Christine Ward (center), and Bridghe McCracken (right).

Bringing Youthful Determination and Skill to Lake Mansfield

It takes a team to care for our community trails. Our volunteer efforts are supported each year when we hire Greenagers Trail Crews to help solve tricky problems at Lake Mansfield. The work is challenging, but these strong, skilled young people are nothing but great.

Last May we were faced with serious erosion on a section of the Lake Mansfield Conservation Forest Trail near the Christian Hill entrance. Unprecedented rains had washed the crushed stone from the trail bed. We hired a Greenagers trail crew for a day to install rubber water bars and surface this Christian Hill section of the trail.

The job was complicated and the work couldn't be accomplished in one day. Greenagers returned, this time to donate a volunteer workday which included 15 students from the Berkshire Waldorf School. Together they wheelbarrowed and compacted the additional surfacing material to complete this major trail repair.



In July our Greenagers Trail Crew joined volunteers for an extensive two days of finishing tasks needed to open the improved lakeside trail and beach area.

We worked together to cordon off sensitive planting areas, repaint trash/recycling receptacles, reinstall the trail kiosk, tend to the vernal pool, remove invasive species, trim the forest trail corridor and remove problematic blow-downs.



Your donation dollars at work: When we hire Greenagers, not only are we able to invest in community trails, but we are also able to invest in our young people. We are providing them with the opportunity to build valuable skills and insight for future conservation efforts.

Our latest challenge for Greenagers involved the replacement of the deteriorating rails and bumpers to repair the trail boardwalk and bridge that protect the forest wetland and stream area. Despite frigid March temperatures, Greenagers milled the materials from native wood, treated the new sections with an eco-friendly preservative, and delivered the materials to the trail site. Working with non-dimensional lumber requires patience and care. Be sure to take a stroll along the forest trail to enjoy this latest youth empowered trail improvement.



Bucket loads of construction stone were removed from the vernal pool beside the shoreline trail (above) and mountains of invasive plants were removed from the forest edge (below). Lichen covered recycle bins were sanded and repainted (left).



Grappling with Geese at Lake Mansfield

In July of last year Lake Mansfield was closed temporarily due to elevated E.coli bacteria levels that were likely caused by an influx of Canada geese. This year the town is trying preemptive measures to keep the beach area and lake water clean and open for recreation. This includes deterrents such as lights that discourage geese from sleeping and nesting at the lake, stationary deterrents in the beach area, and an occasional wildlife control noise maker designed to move geese out of the beach and surrounding area. Note: These deterrents do not harm geese!

Let's keep the lake and beach area healthy! Do not tamper with geese deterrents.

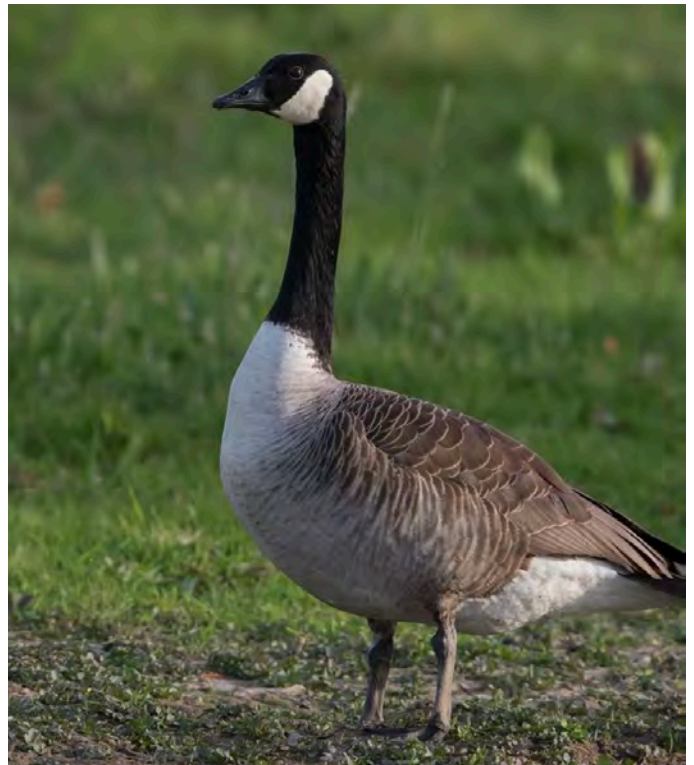
"I urge everyone to help protect our geese deterrents as last year on multiple occasions the deterrents were tampered with or removed by unauthorized personnel. The goal is to deter the geese from the north end of the lake (beach and surrounding area) and let the geese use the south end. Last year was very successful when the DPW Team used multiple methods of deterrents and when they were left untouched. Please note the DPW does not have the resources to keep addressing the deterrents if they get tampered with as they did last year." - Joe Aberdale, DPW Superintendent.

Let's keep wildlife wild! Do not feed waterfowl.

Feeding geese can cause unnatural behavior, pollution, overcrowding, delayed migration, poor nutrition, and disease. As population numbers increase, so do goose droppings. Canada geese produce a half pound to a pound and a half of droppings every day. This influx of fecal matter can contribute to the spread of water-borne disease, such as E. coli, and cause harmful algal blooms. When a large number of these birds are concentrated into a single area, especially small bodies of water like Lake Mansfield, there can be negative impacts on the local ecosystem.



Photo by Ben Garver, *The Berkshire Eagle*, August 2024



Check out this resource from the USDA to learn more about what you can do to protect local water quality without harming these important bird populations: https://www.neefusa.org/sites/default/files/assets/fs_waterfowl.pdf.

Community Programs

Poetree Trail

During the bleak political climate of November 2024, a small group of local women were inspired to reach out to our community with the gift of poetry. What started as one person's idea became a shared journey- these women gathered poems and printed them on naturally dyed muslin. The poems were fastened onto twine and strung from trees along the Lake Mansfield Conservation Forest Trail.

Each poem was an invitation to pause and reflect. Some visitors happened upon the poems by chance, while others were invited by a friend to experience the woodland walk and messages. For many, the Poetree Trail was a way to gather strength and find peace. The poems stayed in place until January 31st and all except the Hopi Prophecy were removed. The group felt that this poem was too relevant and powerful to be taken down.

Today, a second offering of poetry is stirring in the breeze between trees at Lake Mansfield alongside the Hopi Prophecy. This spring, the Poetree Trail offers opportunities to grow our strength and resilience and to join in community as we care for each other and our environment.



Yoga at Lake Mansfield



This is a gentle/moderate class for all levels. Please bring a yoga mat and a towel. The instructor Senta Reis is Kripalu trained and certified. "I truly believe it can offer some real emotional support as well as improving physical health."

Spring Yoga in June - Saturday mornings, 9am.

Summer Yoga in July and August - Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday mornings, 8am.

Fall Yoga in September and October - Saturday mornings 8:30am.

Suggested donation is \$10 per class. For updated information, changes, or cancellations due to weather, please visit the Facebook page "[Yoga on Lake Mansfield](#)".



Baltimore Oriole photo by Pat Zucco.

Guided Birding Walk

Grab your binoculars and join Greg Ward at the Lake Mansfield Beach Area on **Sunday, May 25th at 7:30am**. Lake Mansfield is a birding hot spot- one hundred and fifty bird species have been recorded! Song birds, water fowl, raptors, and woodland birds live in the diverse habitats beside the lake and within the Conservation Forest.

Greg Ward, a Hoffman Bird Club member, will provide birding tips including the distinguishing field marks that help us to identify each species. You will learn about the Merlin app and how to log your sightings to Ebird. Your birding data will become part of the shared global effort to map bird ranges.

Meet Tom Tynning'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 Tynning is heading back to Lake Mansfield on **Thursday, July 24th at 10am** 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. 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.



Lake Mansfield Bluegrass Fundraiser and Celebration - Music! Ice cream! Kids Activities and Community!

Step into summer with tunes and friends in the picturesque setting at Lake Mansfield! Join us for the 3rd Annual Bluegrass Celebration and GBLC Fundraiser on **Saturday, June 7 from 3-6pm**. This lively community event will once again 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. This year we are celebrating the completion of multiple years of community-driven and grant funded improvements to the Lake Mansfield Recreation Area and its habitats. *Proceeds will go to the Great Barrington Land Conservancy to support ongoing stewardship of trails and conservation areas.*



Thank You Lake Mansfield Donors!

YOUR DONATIONS ARE POWERFUL! Last year we invested over \$12,000 in our efforts and programs at Lake Mansfield. We also received a stunning \$15,000 of in-kind support for our planting of trees and shrubs. Over 300 community volunteer hours made all this work possible.



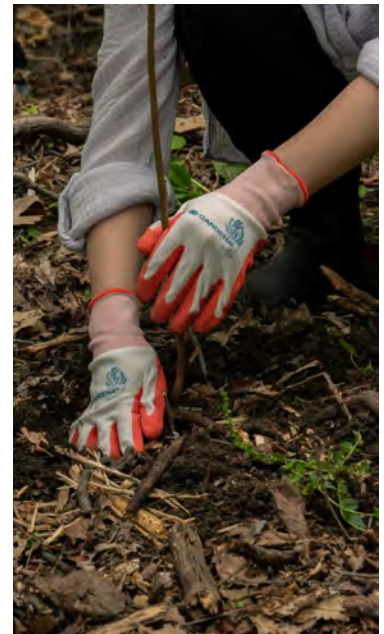
Lake Mansfield is a project of Great Barrington Land Conservancy.

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

2025 Lake Mansfield Volunteer Workdays

Come together and make a difference!

Register at www.GBLand.org. Volunteers should bring work gloves, water bottles, and protective clothing.



Saturday, May 17, 9:30-11:30am – Forest and Lakeside Trail I

Volunteers are needed to collect litter, remove invasive species, and help with the planting of trees, shrubs and perennials.

Welcome Great Barrington Rotary volunteers!
"The international Rotary organization has set May 17 as an epic day of service for its members. The Rotary Club of Great Barrington, which celebrated its 100th anniversary last year, is a member of Rotary International. Their motto is service above self." -Ted Okum, Great Barrington Rotary Service Coordinator

Saturday, May 31, 9:30-11:30am – Beach Area and Lakeside Trail

Tasks at the beach will include installation of native plants along with scattering of native seeds. Led by Christine Ward, Kate and Brad Roblin.

Saturday, June 21, 9:30-11:30am – Forest and Trails II

Tasks in the forest will focus on refreshing trail blazes, litter clean-up, clearing limbs, and removing invasive species. Led by Kate and Brad Roblin.

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.