

BERKSHIRE NATURAL RESOURCES COUNCIL

Summer 2022

LANDKEEPERS

REPORT

WE MUST ACT NOW . . .

to protect farms and preserve our most special places



LANDKEEPERS REPORT

Summer 2022

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BERKSHIRE
Natural Resources Council

THE LANDKEEPERS

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WE MUST ACT NOW

Pressure on Berkshire land is greater than ever—
we have no time to lose

I recently decided to add up how many acres of land BNRC expects to conserve this year. I knew it was a lot—I was thinking it would be 2,000, maybe a bit more. Nope.

We have completed, or are working on, projects that conserve well over SIX THOUSAND ACRES of land this year alone—critical habitat, beautiful views, productive farmland, carbon-sequestering forests and fields.

BNRC won't actually hold all that land. About 2,240 acres will have conservation or agricultural restrictions, meaning that the land can never be developed, but the ownership doesn't change hands. Another 2,700 acres or so are what are called "assists"—situations where we can use our expertise, or throw in some seed money to get a project going, to conserve land that will ultimately be held by someone else. This could be another land trust, a town, or even the Commonwealth. Because BNRC is donor funded, we can move faster than big state agencies, and can help protect land quickly that might otherwise be lost.

I feel a great urgency: with the post-Covid real estate boom showing no signs of slowing down, at least in the Berkshires, the risk to our beautiful landscape is greater than ever. If anything, we must pick up the pace. Farmland is the fastest disappearing land, but any parcel with a bit of road frontage could be snapped up at any time. We must act now, and your support makes it possible.

Finally, all of us at BNRC were heartbroken to lose our long-time board member, Wendy Linscott, who died in April. Wendy's legal acumen, sharp editor's eye, and willingness to ask difficult questions all made her a great board member. She was also a great and beloved friend. Our hearts go out to her daughter, Taylor. Wendy will be truly missed.


—Jenny Hansell, President
jhansell@bnrc.org



With farmland at greater risk than ever, BNRC is developing new strategies to protect agricultural land and support farmers. BNRC President Jenny Hansell, along with board members Karen Ross and Eric Katzman, recently visited a farm in north Berkshire to explore whether it could serve as a pilot site for these new initiatives.



CAN BNRC DO MORE FOR FARMS AND FARMERS?

Exploring creative new approaches to supporting local agriculture

What happens to a farm when the next generation doesn't want to take over running it?

What role can a land trust like BNRC play to help keep farmland in the hands of farmers?

These aren't new questions, but they are taking on more urgency as the value of open land skyrockets.

Farms are disappearing faster than ever—from 2012 to 2017, the Berkshires lost 10% of its farmland, and 80% of what remains is not protected.

At the same time, there are new farmers in the Berkshires seeking land and investment to start a new farm operation. Some are coming to farming after a financially rewarding career elsewhere, and have the means to purchase a valuable property, but many do not.

There are also many organizations working to support agriculture, so BNRC has been asking the question: what can we do to help? Is there a role that only we can play?

The answer about BNRC having a role is yes. We have facilitated the protection of thousands of acres via Agricultural Preservation Restrictions (APRs). And we hold some agricultural land already that we lease to farmers for haying or other crops. Just a few months ago, a 150-acre property with farmland and forest in Richmond was donated outright to BNRC. We will be leasing a portion of it to a local farmer, while opening the rest to public

access. But APRs don't work for every farmer, and not every farmland owner is able to donate their land—in fact most certainly are not.

What can a land trust do? BNRC, led by Director of Community Programs Mackenzie Greer, has been researching this with great care, looking at examples from all over the region. Peer land trusts like the Columbia County Land Trust, Kestrel Land Trust, and Essex County Greenbelt are all pioneering a variety of creative strategies that BNRC could adopt or adapt.

For example, BNRC could buy a farm and conserve the fields, which lowers its resale cost and makes it potentially more affordable to a farmer who might wish to buy it. Or, we could explore owning a farm ourselves, and leasing it to a farmer who could build equity in the farm business and buildings over time.

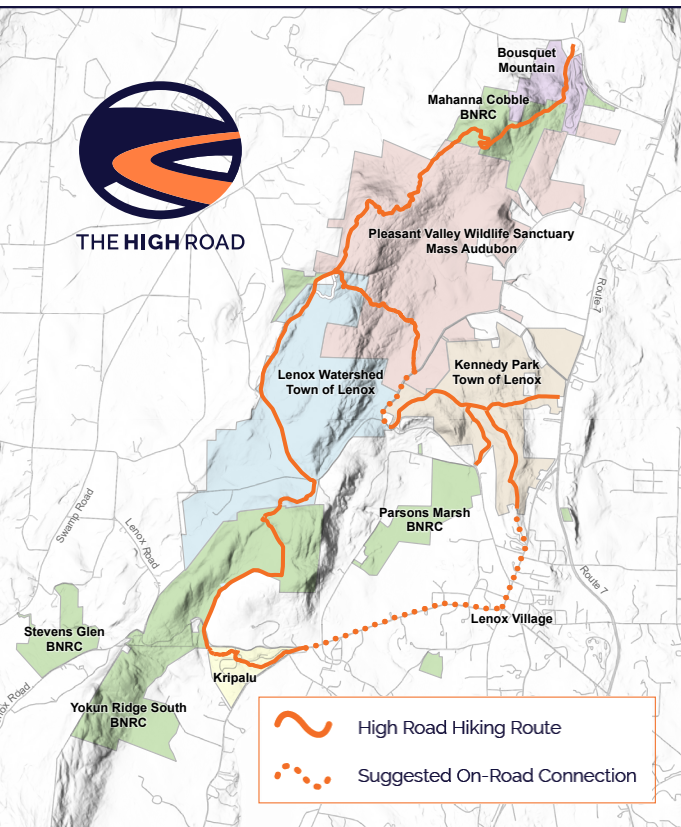
These are just some of the strategies we intend to explore. All of them will need dedicated funding, expertise, and strong relationships with partners.

With the help of donors and supporters, BNRC can make a real contribution to ensuring farms and a farming community in the Berkshires stay viable—and that farmers can afford to live here and work the land. 🌱



FIRST HIGH ROAD LINK FROM PITTSFIELD TO STOCKBRIDGE

Years in the making, the flagship trail for the High Road is open.



Yokun Ridge, the first section of BNRC's countywide trail system, is waiting for you! You can explore this route to enjoy the Berkshires' beauty, unique ecology, and spectacular vistas.

The 9-mile trail spans 5,000 acres of protected woodlands, routing hikers across rocky cliffs and deep into woodlands, and providing stellar views of the lush valleys below. Along this trail you might hear the trill of a wood thrush, observe an ambling porcupine, or encounter one of the many other species that make the ridge their home.

This trail is possible because of partnerships between land managers and conservation organizations who have been conserving the woodlands along the Yokun Ridge for over 90 years. Their support in building and implementing a cooperative vision has been vital in bringing the first segment of the High Road to fruition.

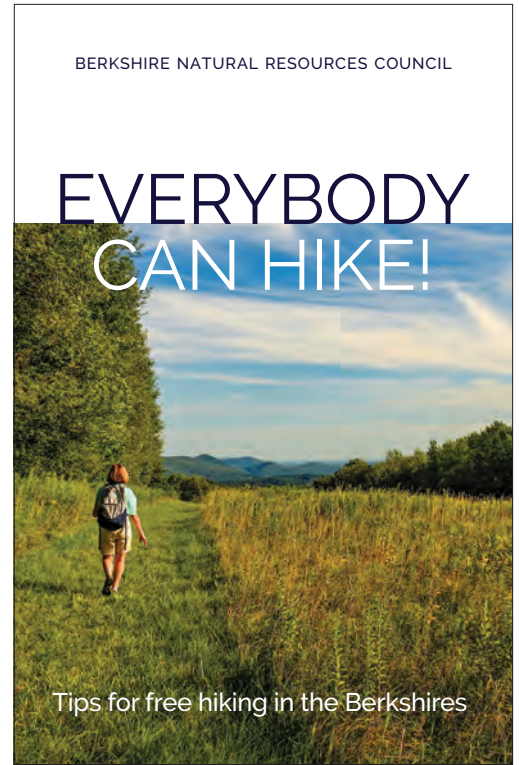
We would like to give special thanks to the following partners:

- Mass Audubon
- Town of Lenox
- Bousquet Mountain
- Kripalu Center for Yoga & Health

We offer our deep appreciation to the many donors, volunteers, and staff who have worked tirelessly to make this vision a reality. Yokun Ridge, like all BNRC trails, is free to hike and open to all.

MAKE A DIFFERENCE EVERY SEASON

All BNRC trails, properties, and programs are free to everybody because of donors. Monthly donors help immensely by providing continual support throughout the year. Visit bnrc.org/contribute and choose the **"monthly donation"** option to start your monthly giving plan today. With just a few clicks, you can make a lasting difference in preserving Berkshire forests and wildlife, protecting local farms, enriching climate resilience, and increasing access to nature for everyone.



NEW GUIDES SHOW THE WAY

New BNRC events and publications to deepen your connection to nature

New hikes, outings, and publications make it even easier to enjoy the outdoors.

People learn to love nature in so many ways, and there are so many ways to enjoy it. Lunch on a park bench, the sound of the birds on a quiet stroll, games with children on your favorite trail, getting your heart rate up on a steep climb. BNRC offers outdoor experiences, education, and resources for the Berkshire community and beyond to establish and build on those connections to nature.

This August, we invite you to enjoy two new offerings, the *Easy Naturalist: Signs of Summer* self-guided walk, and a guided *Family Summer Discovery Hike*, both at Wild Acres in Pittsfield. These outings are offered in partnership with the Berkshire Athenaeum, Berkshire Family Hikes, and the City of Pittsfield for the 2022 Summer Reading Theme: Read Beyond the Beaten Path. **Visit bnrc.org/upcoming-hikes for more information and other events.**

Two new BNRC publications will make it easier for people to explore nature in new ways:

Berkshire County Trails for All, a brochure featuring six accessible trails in the Berkshires, was developed as part of a BNRC partnership with Berkshire Family Hikes and the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, to help people find ADA-accessible trails. Each trail will have a streamlined description that gives enough information for a user to decide if it is a good fit for them before they visit.

Everybody Can Hike is a user-friendly resource to share information on what to bring, what to expect, and how to stay safe on the trails. This innovative guide and online resource was conceived in partnership with Latinas 413, Berkshire Immigrant Center, and Berkshire Language Management. BNRC is committed to ongoing learning, action toward meeting needs, community needs, and ensuring that BNRC trails are truly welcoming to all. 🌿



EVERYONE, OUTSIDE, TOGETHER

Perfect mornings. Slow sunsets. Fireflies. Leisure—and hustle. While every season is special in the Berkshires, for many, summer is the crown jewel. Here are a few places where you can enjoy the Berkshire summer outdoors, for free, thanks to donors and volunteers.

Old Mill Trail | Hinsdale, Dalton



This riverside trail is a treat for people of all abilities. The first 0.7 miles of this largely forested, out-and-back trail is designed for strollers, walkers, wheelchairs, and anyone who enjoys a path that glides. Some will choose to cross Route 8 and continue on another 0.8 miles, where you get to walk on stones right atop the river with a bit of water jumping up to kiss your boots. Hinsdale Trading Company, located across the road from the trailhead, serves up giant sandwiches with country charm. *From the center of Dalton: take Route 8 south to the Hinsdale line. From the town line, continue 0.4 miles to a left on Old Dalton Road. The trailhead parking is the first, immediate left.*

Olivia's Overlook at Yokun Ridge South | Lenox, Richmond, Stockbridge



Olivia's Overlook is at the center of the 734-acre Yokun Ridge South reserve in the heart of central Berkshire County. This popular overlook is also the trailhead for six miles of trail. All four trails are moderate in difficulty. A slow summertime walk on the Brothers Trail to Monk's Pond is a Berkshire delight. *Immediately south of Tanglewood in Lenox, drive up Richmond Mountain Road (to the right of the Kripalu entrance) 1.5 miles to the parking area on your left. For quicker access to Monk's Pond, travel only 0.9 miles on Richmond Mountain Road to the trailhead on the right.*

Parking lot full? Please don't park on the road. Try the BNRC Trails App to find a nearby hiking alternative!



Clam River | Sandisfield



A summer gem. Explore a 1.5-mile expanse along this wild, forested river and see evidence of a time when the stream and its surrounding area were not so wild: traces of a dam, stone walls, and a house foundation. This 550-acre reserve has three connected trails of 4.3 miles total, with moderate change of elevation. The Hammertown Loop Trail is a BNRC favorite. *Four-season access is available from the Sandisfield Town Hall at 66 Sandisfield Road. For quicker summer access to the Hammertown Loop Trail, turn off Sandisfield Road, and travel 1.5 miles northeast on Hammertown Road.*

Mahanna Cobble | Pittsfield



Mahanna Cobble is a terrific counterpart to the other dramatic hikes of the Berkshires. Located in the center of the county, this 222-acre reserve is close to town, has tremendous views, and a great picnic spot at the top of your climb. This 3.2-mile round-trip out-and-back hike is also the start of BNRC's High Road trail. The 1.6-mile uphill hike to the vista is a nice reward for your effort! *The trail*

begins at Bousquet Mountain. Its first 0.6 miles is on ski area property along a ski trail. Start at 101 Dan Fox Drive, Pittsfield, MA 01201.

Hoosac Range | North Adams



A three-mile-long ridge trail (6 miles round trip) atop the Berkshires' northeastern wall, Hoosac Range passes several dramatic vistas, including the trail's Spruce Hill destination. A much shorter hike, 1.6 miles round trip, leads to Sunset Rock, which has spectacular views overlooking North Adams. Spruce Hill is a strenuous hike due to length and terrain; the Sunset Rock portion is moderate due to elevation change. *Take Route 2 east from North Adams. Find the parking area on your right, just past the Wigwam Cabins after the hairpin turn.*

THAT'S NOT ALL!

These are only five of the 50+ BNRC reserves across the Berkshires that are free and open to everybody,



thanks to donors. See all BNRC reserves at bnrc.org/reserves.

Or download the BNRC Berkshire Trails app at bnrc.org/app. Savor the season! 🍂

WORKING TOGETHER TO CARE FOR NATURE

Volunteers restore habitat, clear trails, and share a lot of laughter. Join us!



NestWatch volunteers collecting data.

Each year, nearly a hundred volunteers help BNRC with habitat restoration, keeping the trails clear of fallen debris, new trail construction, updating trail blazes to help with navigation, and more. Volunteer workdays are filled with laughter and each person

brings information and tips to share from their own passions and adventures.

New to the volunteer program this year is a Community Science program called NestWatch. NestWatch is a nationwide community-driven research initiative led by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology that aims to assess the status of bird populations in relation to environmental stressors and a changing climate. This spring, BNRC volunteers began monitoring nests to collect data on the timing of nesting, the number of eggs laid, how many eggs hatch, and how many hatchlings survive.

Participants are now getting to see the season's first brood of bluebirds and tree swallows fledge. This is a fantastic experiential learning opportunity for all ages (a homeschooled family of three has been participating!) with a true impact on the world of science.

If you're interested in joining BNRC's volunteer team visit bnrc.org/volunteer. 🌿

MEET BNRC'S 2022 STEWARDSHIP CREW!

This dedicated team maintains current trails, builds new trail features, and stocks English and Spanish language trail maps at trail kiosks.



Natalie Gursky, from South Bend, IN joins BNRC as a Trail Crew intern through the Student Conservation Association.

Justin McCarthy is from North Adams, MA. Justin is pursuing his Bachelor's in Environmental

Science with a Natural Resources and Conservation focus at Southern New Hampshire University.

Ethan Milette, from Pittsfield, MA, plans to further his studies in Natural Resources Conservation at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

Austin O'Brien is a Berkshire native and is joining the Stewardship Crew for his second season. Austin is working towards a Bachelor's Degree in Environmental Science.

Maddy Staples is originally from eastern Massachusetts with a degree in Sustainable Community Development from Umass Amherst, and brings a strong interest in conservation.



Stevens Glen



Steepletop

NO MORE WET FEET

New bridges and stream crossings to make your hike easier and safer

The Berkshires gets abundant year-round precipitation—enough to keep streams and rivers running, ponds and lakes filled, and lush vegetation covering the land.

Too *much* water, however, can present a challenge to hikers and to BNRC's stewardship team. Torrential rains from thunderstorms or hurricanes can wash out portions of trail and undermine bridges. Beavers can build dams that flood trails. Sometimes a trail must be routed across a low spot that can turn into a stream after heavy rain or snowmelt.

Many hikers go around muddy spots or puddles in a trail, eroding the surrounding soil and damaging vegetation. To protect against this, wet trails need to be made passable. BNRC donors and the stewardship team make it happen.

It can take months, or even years, to complete. Three BNRC properties are currently in various stages of this process.

At **Stevens Glen in Richmond**, several severe storms over the last decade damaged the four bridges at the property. The process of planning repairs began years ago. Two bridges had to be removed and replaced. The trail was re-routed to access the new crossing. A new bridge, fabricated in Pennsylvania from fiber-reinforced plastic and shipped to BNRC in kit form, was assembled and installed late last year at a more stable section of the stream. The final step in the project will occur this season, when another bridge, still structurally sound but heaved up out of a horizontal position, will be hoisted and set back down level on its abutments.

At **Steepletop in New Marlborough** the stretch of trail that lies between the two wetlands has become waterlogged. Over time, beaver activity has raised the water level on either side, and the causeway has been riddled with beaver and other animals' tunnels.

Bog bridging was installed in May across the saturated portion of the trail. A more permanent solution will be to rebuild the causeway, raising it well above grade and making it solid enough to handle BNRC vehicles.

The beautiful lower woodland trail at **Basin Pond in Lee** crosses several seeps, intermittent streams, and Basin Pond Brook. The crossings have step-stones or planks that are perpetually damp, making for uncertain footing. Plans to make it easier to traverse these spots have been submitted to the Town of Lee for approval. Footbridges with handrails will be placed at two of the intermittent streams, and step stones will be lifted and reset to provide secure footing at the other crossings. The on-site work is scheduled to begin in September (pending the permit) and will take two months to complete.

A huge thank-you to BNRC supporters—you make projects like these possible! Thank you, too, for your patience as these projects move slowly but surely from thought to finish. You make the Berkshires a better place for everyone! 🌲



CONSERVATION UPDATE: TWO ICONIC BERKSHIRE PROPERTIES CONSERVED

Ice House Hill Farm in Richmond and Bidwell House in Monterey are fully protected

When Jeff Belair was first out of college and working in Boston, he'd come home to Pittsfield after an exhausting workweek just to climb to the top of Ice House Hill for some peace and solace.

"Ice House Hill has always been incredibly important to me," said Belair, BNRC's board treasurer. "I grew up going there with my friends—we'd sit there looking out at the view and talk about everything. I proposed to my wife there; we still treasure it as one of the most beautiful spots, not just in the Berkshires, but anywhere. I'm so thrilled that the landowners and BNRC have protected it forever. It's so Berkshire."

The 130-acre **Farm at Ice House Hill**, with its herd of Hereford cattle, diverse bird and animal life, and timeless views, is one of several iconic properties placed into the Massachusetts Conservation Restriction program this year, with well over 2,000 additional acres currently in the works through the efforts of BNRC's conservation team and local partners.

Another beloved landmark that is now forever protected is the property surrounding the **Bidwell House Museum** in Monterey. Thanks to

the generosity of Joyce and Lew Scheffey—who endowed a fund that made it possible to purchase the conservation restriction (with the funds going to Bidwell House)—this project supports the museum's historical and cultural offerings, and ensures public access to over six miles of trails that are open year-round, free of charge.

Bidwell House is an important historical site in the southern Berkshires. In addition to Rev. Adonijah Bidwell's 1760s home, the acres of forests and fields around the house contain the remains of important historical sites. These include cellar holes from the home of the early residents of Tyringham (which later split to become Monterey); the site of the original Meetinghouse where Reverend Bidwell preached his sermons; the remains of the Boston-Albany Post Road; and many more relics. 🌿

To inquire about conservation options on your land, call Beth Mills at 413-499-0596, or email Beth at bmills@bnrc.org.

Savvy Ways to Give Generously

For conservation, wildlife, farms, outdoor access,
and climate resilience in the Berkshires

Increasingly, BNRC donors are using these savvy donation methods.
Is one of these right for you?

Do you have a **Donor Advised Fund**? Commit to give away half the funds in your DAF by September 30, and the grants you make will be eligible for #HalfMyDAF matches. **Learn more at halfmydaf.com.**

Donating **appreciated stock** is a high-impact, tax-advantaged way to protect the natural beauty and ecological integrity of the Berkshires. **Get started at bnrc.org/givestocks.**

If you are 72 or older, you can make a tax-free **donation from your IRA**, and even meet your required minimum distribution (RMD). **Inquire with your plan administrator or financial advisor!**

You can help conserve the Berkshires at ZERO COST today through a **legacy bequest**. BNRC partners with an online service that helps you create your legal will for free (or draft a will for review with an attorney). **See freewill.com/bnrc.**

Donate cryptocurrency and give from your gains! Crypto donors typically avoid capital gains tax, are able to deduct the full amount of their donation, and can then use fiat to repurchase standing in the donated asset if they choose. **Be part of BNRC's crypto team at bnrc.org/donatecrypto.**

None of the above is financial or tax advice. Always consult with a professional, certified, financial advisor before making any financial decision.

Of course, most donors do donate cash, which is always welcome, and contributes enormously to everything we accomplish together through BNRC for the region.



You can quickly donate cash anytime, or schedule an easy monthly contribution, at bnrc.org/contribute.

Thank you for everything you do to care for the Berkshire outdoors!

Questions? Contact Rich Montone at rmontone@bnrc.org, or 413-499-0596 x5.





BERKSHIRE

Natural Resources Council

THE LANDKEEPERS

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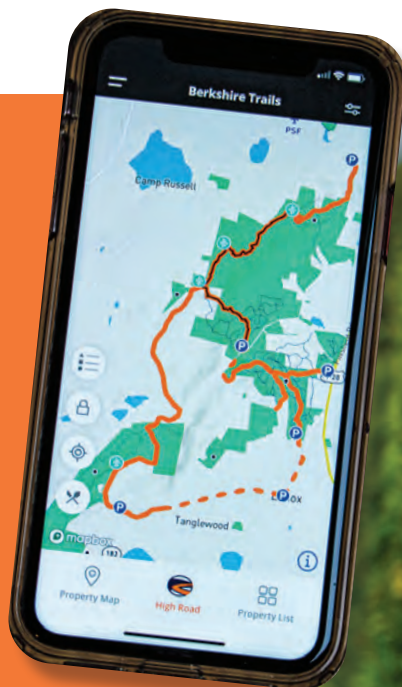
BNRC is donor funded.

Scan to donate!

TRY THE BNRC Berkshire Trails App

The BNRC Berkshire Trails app for Android and iOS is a great way to plan outdoor adventures in the Berkshires—in advance or on the go.

- Trails and info on BNRC reserves, and other locations too
- Save and share your favorite hikes and outings
- 100% Berkshire, and 100% free, thanks to donors!



bnrc.org/app

"You could spend a wonderful week wandering Berkshire County's back roads, using this app to guide you from one secluded wonder to the next."

—New York Times

