

SPRING 2024

THE BNRC Report



BERKSHIRE NATURAL RESOURCES COUNCIL

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for Many Years

THE BNRC Report

SPRING 2024

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THIS EARTH DAY, I'M LOOKING AHEAD TO NOVEMBER

Our environmental future is at stake

They paved paradise, put up a parking lot.

I've been humming those words recently, as I've noticed new construction all around the Berkshires.

They took all the trees, put 'em in a tree museum

Sometimes it seems like we're losing our trees, and farms, and wetlands, faster than ever. On Earth Day 2024, together with you, BNRC is working hard to stem—and reverse—those losses.

Senator Gaylord Nelson organized the first Earth Day in 1970 (coincidentally, Joni Mitchell released "Big Yellow Taxi" that same year—three years after BNRC was founded).

People rallied around Earth Day and by the end of that year, the US Environmental Protection Agency was born. Over the next decade, critical environmental legislation was enacted, including the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, and much more.

Why the history lesson?

Because this year, our clean water, clean air, clean energy, wetlands protections, environmental justice, and our country's commitment to fighting climate change are all on the line.

Many of the largest grants that fund land conservation projects come from state agencies, and those funding priorities are set by our elected officials.

At every level, from your town, to state legislature, to national elections, the people you put into office next year will determine whether key laws are passed, regulations are enforced—or gutted.

For example, in Massachusetts, the future of the Conservation Land Tax Credit, which provides tax incentives for landowners to conserve their land, is up for an increase this year—a change that would enable thousands more acres to be protected.

Don't it always seem to go

That you don't know what you've got 'til it's gone.

Don't wait til it's gone.

This Earth Day, go outside. Relax, breathe in the spring air. Refresh yourself, soak in the strength that nature gives you. Then give back to nature, strengthen her, by making sure that we are all doing everything we can to protect her.

Warmly,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jenny".

Jenny Hansell, President
jhansell@bnrc.org



MAPPING THE FUTURE OF BERKSHIRE CONSERVATION

Prioritizing the land we need to conserve—together.

What Berkshire landscapes are most at risk? Which parcels are highest priority to protect?

BNRC is working on new technology to find answers and bolster conservation efforts county-wide.

With funding from the Land Trust Alliance, the Open Space Institute, and a Wild East Grant from the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, and guidance from Rick Lederer-Barnes of Upstate GIS, BNRC's geospatial model—a mapping system using Geographic Information Systems (GIS)—is near completion.

Important conservation goals identified in BNRC's Strategic Conservation Plan have been translated into measurable criteria. Using data from the Commonwealth and The Nature Conservancy, the model weights the relative importance of various conservation criteria including ecology/habitat, climate resiliency, water quality, agricultural lands, and recreational values. The model helps identify the presence or absence of those criteria in parcels across Berkshire County.

"It's a more efficient way to look at the work ahead and be proactive about projects that come our way," says Beth Mills, Director of Land Conservation. "We can use the model to better understand the landscape and scale where we put our attention,

so that our impact and goals are attainable."

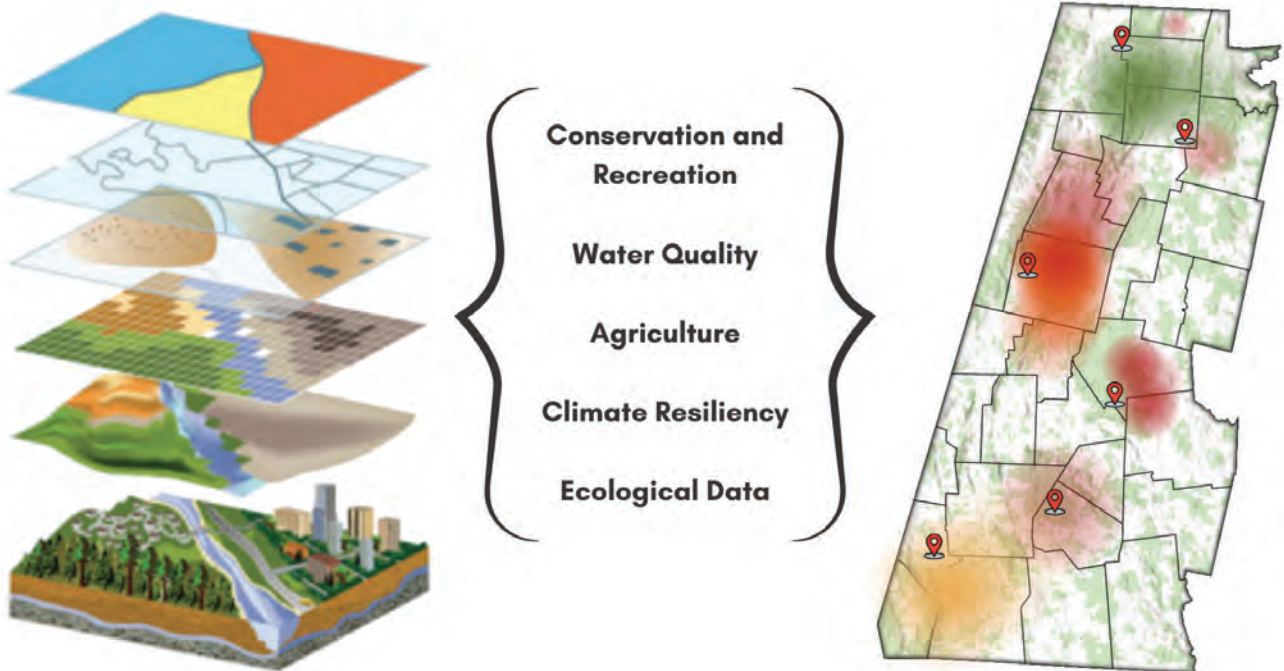
GIS data always informs BNRC's conservation decisions; this model can be used for planning and to predict fundraising needs, too. By putting the data into this platform, staff can better understand where conservation dollars—that come from you, and other BNRC donors—will be best spent.

The model will enable us to ask complicated questions, and get answers to help guide donor-funded conservation efforts," BNRC President Jenny Hansell said.

Questions like: Which landscapes are doing the most to sequester carbon? How can we best manage them to promote climate resilience? This geospatial tool helps target and focus.

The model will also be invaluable in supporting local land trusts. Using this data, we can query the model to answer their specific questions about the location of lands of high conservation value in their town or watershed.

As Karen Ross, long-time BNRC board member, observes, "this is an incredibly valuable tool that brings evidence-based decisions to the fore, to be combined with BNRC's local knowledge and personal connections." 🌍





YOUR SPRING FLASH

Spring in the Berkshires is a remarkable explosion of new life and baby green. The air smells like mud, and possibility. The Berkshire spring is brief and lovely, and then gives way to the region's brilliant summer and glorious autumn. Here are just a few of many places to make the most of this special time of year, recommended by organizations that BNRC collaborates with frequently.

Parsons Marsh | Lenox



Recommended by **Unpaved Trails for All**

Explore forest and wetlands near the heart of Lenox. The hard-pack and boardwalk of this 2/3 mile round-trip, out-and-back path make it possible for many with mobility concerns to get some fresh spring air, look for wildlife, and see the wetlands waking up. The boardwalk is 41 inches wide. There are pull-outs for passing designed for mobility devices, though some may find them farther apart than comfortable. From the center of Lenox, take MA 183 South. Turn right on Undermountain Road. The trailhead is 0.9 miles down the road on the right.

Old Mill Trail | Hinsdale/Dalton



Recommended by **Latinas413**

This forested riverside trail is great for a wide range of abilities. The first 0.7 miles of the out-and-back route is designed with strollers, walkers, wheelchairs, and anyone who enjoys an easy path in mind. Some will choose to cross Route 8 and continue another 0.8 miles, where you get to walk on stones right atop the river. Bring fishing gear if you like—this eastern branch of the Housatonic River is clean. From the center of Dalton take Route 8 south to the Hinsdale town line. continue 0.4 miles to a left on Old Dalton Road. The trailhead parking is the first, immediate left.

PARKING LOT FULL? Please don't park on the road. Try the **BNRC Trails App** to find a nearby alternative!



The Boulders | Dalton/Lanesborough/Pittsfield



Recommended by **Berkshire Immigrant Center**

The 645 acres at The Boulders provide more than six miles of trails. Red trillium and pink lady's slipper show up in spring, among many other ephemeral wildflowers. The dramatic boulders that give the area its name, and that offer a vista to the west, are found atop the Blue Trail—most directly accessed from the parking area near the junction of Hubbard Avenue and Dalton Avenue (Route 8/g). Or enter the reserve from the east side of Gulf Road in Dalton, opposite the parking for the Appalachian Trail. Four trails here range from easy to moderate difficulty.

Hoosac Range | North Adams



Recommended by **DEI Outdoors**

A three-mile ridge trail (six miles roundtrip) atop the northeastern wall of the Berkshires. The trail passes several dramatic vistas before reaching 180-degree views into Vermont. A shorter hike on the Sunset Rock loop, 1.6 miles roundtrip, also has great views overlooking North Adams. The trail to Spruce Hill is strenuous due to length and terrain. The Sunset Rock portion is moderate in difficulty due to elevation change. Winter stays late at Hoosac Range—be prepared! Take Route 2 east and find the parking area to your right, just past the hairpin turn and the Wigwam Western Summit gift shop and cafe.

Widow White | Lanesborough



Recommended by **Berkshire Family Hikes**

This 270-acre reserve features Secum Brook, one of the biggest sources of Pontoosuc Lake. The brook disappears several miles into underground channels. One stretch of stream cuts an imposing ravine into the mountainside. Look for 19th-century graffiti by a spurned suitor. Incredible glacial erratics and spring ephemerals. No marked trails, but wide woods roads to explore. Moderate difficulty: unmarked and steep terrain. Accessed from an unimproved trailhead off Silver Street.




Mt. Hunger at Konkapot Ridge | Monterey



NEW! Recommended by **BNRC**

Blue blazes guide you along the 1.4-mile out-and-back trail with interesting rock formations and a gradual elevation change of about 240 feet. Enjoy views of Tyringham Valley, Tyringham Cobble, and the Catskill Mountains. Steadman Pond at Konkapot Ridge is nearby and offers a short walk to a scenic pond. Monterey Preservation Land Trust played a critical role in originally protecting this land and continues to be a vital player in Berkshire conservation efforts. The reserve is named for tribal leader John Konkapot, and honors the deeply rooted connection of the Mohican people to their homelands. For directions from different approach points, see bnrc.org/reserves/mt-hunger-at-konkapot-ridge.

THAT'S NOT ALL!

These are only six of the nearly 60 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. 

LANESBOROUGH LANDS LINKED

Celebrating a big win for Berkshire conservation (and The High Road, too)



Photos: Douglas Brown



A 178-acre parcel of land, to be called **Farnam's Hill**, has been acquired by BNRC. The team could not be more excited.

Rising from Route 7 to the top of the ridge, the property is dotted with old farm fields divided by winding streams, with remnants of old orchards, healthy woods and wetlands that create rich and diverse habitat for wildlife—exactly the kind of connecting parcel that is high priority for BNRC.

"This project serves as a really good example of how a parcel can be conserved for a multitude of reasons," says High Road Manager Deanna Smith. As BNRC's newest reserve, it will also provide expanded public access for recreation, and offer incredible views of the Taconic Mountains and Mount Greylock in the "leaf off" season.

For Beth Mills, Director of Conservation, one of the most important aspects of this acquisition is the large acreage of intact, unfragmented forest cover.

"This is a huge win for conservation and will support the many local species that rely on a safe place to live and roam," she says.

BNRC is working to expand protection of the forested uplands that connect Pittsfield State Forest and Mt. Greylock State Reservation as well as other conserved land in the Towns of Lanesborough, New Ashford, and Hancock for climate resiliency and public access to natural areas.

For those keeping tabs on the development of The High Road, this acquisition will contribute to the creation of a cross-county connector segment that will link two major long-distance trail, the Taconic Crest Trail and the Ashuwillticook Rail Trails.




Projects like this require a great deal of collaboration and financial support. BNRC is grateful for a significant anonymous gift, a generous grant from the Nion Robert Theriot Foundation, those who contributed to The High Road project,

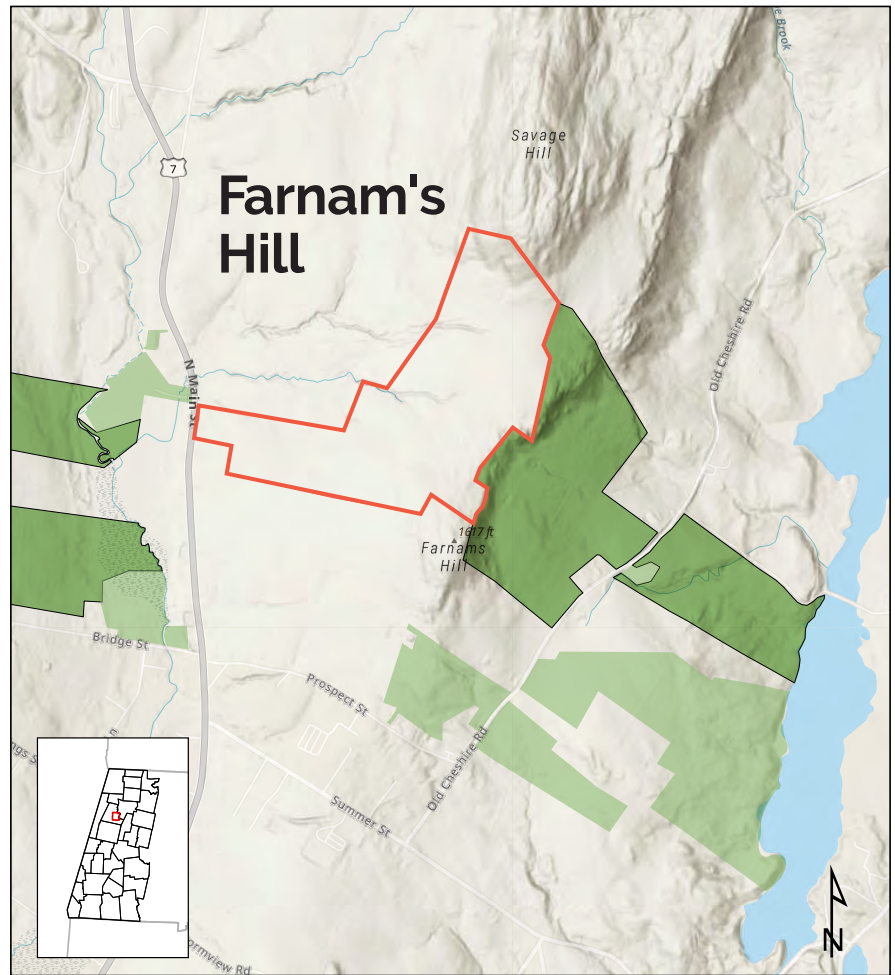
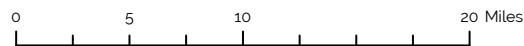
Why are large parcels of connected land so important for climate resilience?

Berkshire County is a part of the Northern Appalachian Region, with its diverse elevations, varied microclimates, and unique temperature and precipitation patterns. Keeping these forested mountains and hillsides connected allows plants and animals space to move and adapt to changing conditions.

and all BNRC donors for providing funds needed to protect Farnam's Hill forever. BNRC also recognizes with appreciation the Town of Lanesborough, especially its Select Board, for their partnership.

So what's next? BNRC's Stewardship Team have begun planning a trail on the parcel, and, eventually, a parking lot. Projects move through several phases before construction work can begin, including design, permitting, funding, and more. Stay tuned for more news in the coming years. In the meantime, let's celebrate this incredible win for Berkshire conservation! 🌿

-  New Acquisition
-  BNRC Conserved Land
-  Other Conserved Land



HELIA NATIVE NURSERY DONATES NATIVE TREES

Creating more habitat and offsetting emissions

In November 2023, Helia had the pleasure of partnering with BNRC to plant 120 donated native trees at the Alford Springs Reserve. This initiative plays a significant role in addressing climate change by offering a tangible way to counterbalance their vehicle emissions annually. By planting native trees and local genotypes we are also highlighting critical habitat for native birds, insects, bees, butterflies, and small mammals.

We are thrilled to maintain this enriching tradition as we embark on our seventh annual tree planting campaign to rebuild habitat and offset carbon. Planting five trees offsets the carbon emitted by one car in a year. We welcome whoever would like to volunteer and join in the November Carbon Offset Program planting to create more native habitat here in the Berkshires. Visit healianativenursery.com to purchase five trees now, for planting in November.



Thank you Helia Native Nursery for sponsoring this issue of *The BNRC Report*.



Photo: Douglas Brown

CARING FOR THE FOREST AS IT CHANGES

Science can tell us a lot about how climate change will impact our woodlands in the next 50 to 100 years.

Land management staff at BNRC are studying and consulting the latest research to make sure we are making the best possible decisions for the lands BNRC stewards.

Steepletop, BNRC's second-largest reserve, is pristine forest. Barely touched by invasives, it is a healthy ecosystem, even though the trees are largely the same age, having grown up since the 1850s.

Constitution Hill has some pockets of invasives, but is largely intact. Housatonic Fishing Access, on the other hand, was until recently, overrun by invasives—there was almost nothing native left.

Human activity, plus a changing climate, has affected these lands in different ways.

The Berkshires are probably protected from the worst impacts of climate change—we won't have coastal flooding, and the highest temperatures will never be as severe here as in the southwest. But we'll continue to have periods of intense rainfall leading to flooded rivers and streams. And, warmer temperatures allow invasive plants and insects to thrive. There's a lot we can do now to protect the health of our forests and to ensure the greatest biodiversity into the future. We can't stop the climate from changing, but we can adapt.

Resistance, Resilience, Transition

The three reserves above are examples of different strategies BNRC is using. At Steepletop, where the forest is healthy, we can focus on resisting the effects of climate change. Here, the best way to promote carbon storage and biodiversity is to replicate old-growth conditions. Trees in Massachusetts are all relatively young—much of the land here was farmed until only about 150 years ago, so we don't have the wide range of age-classes of trees in a true old-growth forest.

But with carefully selected cuts, we can create openings in the canopy, allowing light into the understory. The felled trees create a wider variety of habitat, and open area allows for new, fast-growing trees, which sequester carbon quickly. Over time, this creates richer, healthier woodland. Other parts of the forest will be left completely alone—“forever wild.”

Constitution Hill has already been affected by invasives and will require more intervention—

a “resilience” approach, to enable it to return to healthy conditions. We recently treated 30 acres of barberry there and will also undertake some forestry work to create early successional habitat.

Some areas cannot be restored to their original conditions and need to be “transitioned” to be more able to withstand future conditions. That could be tree species better adapted to warmer temperatures.

“On some properties we see hemlocks dying back from hemlock woolly adelgid; on others we see beech trees that were living with beech bark disease now dying back as beech leaf disease moves through,” says Jenifer Dickinson. In her role as Stewardship Coordinator, she visits and monitors all of BNRC’s 58 reserves and 110 conservation restrictions, so she sees the wide range of conditions across the county. “You can’t always just let nature take its course,” Jenifer adds, “especially when it comes to areas already impacted by climate change—if you do, invasive species have the potential to take over and crowd out the species that provide habitat for native insects, birds and animals.”

“All of us have a responsibility to make wise management decisions on our land—even a 10-acre parcel is part of the larger ecosystem and the choices made there affect our overall resilience,” Jenifer says.


To learn more about how to care for your woodlands for maximum sustainability, contact BNRC or MassWoods.org. 



Photo: Jenifer Dickinson

At Housatonic Fishing Access, invasive species had completely taken over. After a habitat restoration project, native goldenrod and silver maple are thriving, providing rich habitat for native bees and other insects, birds and animals.

Adaptation is the adjustment of systems in preparation of, or in response, to climate change



Photo: Jenifer Dickinson

Matt Monaghan’s family bought 106 acres in Hancock in 1996 and completed a conservation restriction to protect the land with BNRC. He now lives there with his family and is working with forester Peter Tucker to ensure the long-term sustainability of the woodlands there. It was choked with invasives, but acre by acre, he’s replacing a tangle of bittersweet, multiflora rose, and buckthorn with healthy trees. “We’re taking out the old red pine that was planted in the 1930s and never managed or thinned,” he said. “Instead, we’re planting black cherry, oak, and maple, and using silvopasture”—the practice of integrating trees and grazing on the same land. His cows and goats are eating away the bittersweet, while producing milk, yogurt, and cheese.

CONSERVATION PERSPECTIVES

From 30,000 feet, a pilot connects with his passion for Berkshire conservation.



Mark on the trails at Yokun Ridge South, near Olivia's Overlook. "I definitely feel a responsibility to help preserve the uniqueness of the Berkshires for future generations of residents and visitors."

Mark Vanhoenacker is a Pittsfield-born champion of Berkshire conservation. He is also a 787 airline captain, author, and frequent contributor for the *New York Times*, who keeps his heart and home in our local hills.

Growing up in the Berkshires, Mark had the sense that nature was everywhere. "In just minutes, I could bike out into what looked like wilderness. Even in town . . . it was easy to look up and see forested hills rising from every horizon."

Mark says that leaving home and traveling for work to far-flung places around the world gave him a new perspective on the value of local conservation.

"I realized two important things about the landscape of my childhood. First, not everywhere looks like this! The Berkshires are uniquely beautiful. And second, it's not just by chance that the Berkshires are so well preserved. It's the result of decades of action and dedication by individuals."

For the past 20 years, Mark has been one of those dedicated individuals. Measuring by number of gifts, he is the most prolific donor in BNRC history. Like many other BNRC donors, Mark finds

that donating monthly is an easy way to make a significant contribution to Berkshire conservation.

"It makes sense to me that monthly giving allows organizations to make longer-term plans. And conservation, after all, is the ultimate long-term plan," said Mark. "Donating monthly, no matter how far away work has taken me from the Berkshires, allows me to feel like I'm still a part of the home region."

Mark finds the pre-planned nature of monthly giving to support his values feels good. "Modern life is complicated, but setting up a regular donation means that you know that every month, you're always doing at least one thing right." 🌱

JOIN THE MONTHLY DONOR CREW!

Donors like Mark who choose to give monthly provide continual, and critical, support throughout the year. This means ongoing resources that preserve forests and wildlife, support local farmers, enrich Berkshire climate resilience, and ensure free access to the Berkshire outdoors for everybody.

You can join the crew for as little as \$5 a month. Visit bnrc.org/donate and choose the "monthly donor" option to get started. Thank you for making a difference, x12!

DO YOU DAF?

Donor Advised Funds make it easy to be generous and can help engender intergenerational family giving traditions, too!

BNRC receives hundreds of donations from **Donor Advised Funds**. These thoughtful gifts support conservation, wildlife protection, farm preservation, climate resilience, and FREE access to the Berkshire outdoors for everybody. **Please consider using your Donor Advised Fund to care for the Berkshire outdoors today.** And check out halfmydaf.com—a nonprofit that matches DAF donations to nonprofits.

Many Ways to Give Generously

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

Make a lasting difference for conservation, wildlife, farms, outdoor access, and climate resilience in the Berkshires:

Do you have a **Donor Advised Fund**? BNRC gratefully receives many DAF grant disbursements. Some qualify for matching funds from [halfmydaf.com](https://www.halfmydaf.com). Set up a disbursement with your fund administrator today!

Donating **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 73 or older, you can make a tax-free **donation from your IRA**, and even meet your required minimum distribution (RMD). Your plan administrator or financial advisor can help you **set up a contribution that's right for you!**

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

Donate cryptocurrency. Give from your gains! Crypto donors typically avoid capital gains tax, are able to deduct the full amount of their donation. **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, MANY donors contribute cash, which helps enormously for everything we accomplish together through BNRC.



See all the ways you can be part of the BNRC donor team, including online giving, at bnrc.org/donate.

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

Questions? Contact Kathleen Smolinski at ksmolinski@bnrc.org or 413-499-0596 x118



Photo right: Christina Lane Photography



Berkshire Natural Resources Council

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Discover a New Hike for **Earth Day**

Mt. Hunger at Konkapot Ridge—BNRC's newest reserve—is waiting for you! Konkapot Ridge is named for tribal leader John Konkapot and the connection of the Mohican people to their homelands. The Mt. Hunger trail provides vistas and a wooded ridgeline with interesting rock formations.

Find even more great spring hikes on page 4.