

Spring 2023

# Landkeepers

## REPORT



BERKSHIRE NATURAL RESOURCES COUNCIL

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## LANDKEEPERS REPORT SPRING 2023

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**BERKSHIRE**  
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309 Pittsfield Road, Suite B  
Lenox MA 01240

413-499-0596 | [bnrc.org](http://bnrc.org)

## FINDING REASONS FOR HOPE

### In the Resilient Berkshire Landscape

What is it like to have a career  
in conservation in the context  
of climate change?

At the "Ask me Anything"  
session BNRC hosted a few weeks  
ago, someone asked us this  
thoughtful question, which reminded

me of my reason for stepping into this role five years ago. I'd been saying  
to myself for years that I wanted my next job to be something that made  
an impact on climate change. I'm still so glad to have that chance.

Our Stewardship Director, Doug Brown, answered the question from  
a different angle.

He says, "I know the science behind climate change, and there  
are plenty of reasons to feel dragged down. However, I choose to find  
hope in understanding the history of our landscape. The Berkshires are  
inherently resilient.

Over the last few hundred years, this land was almost completely  
forested, and then completely agrarian, and now has returned largely  
to a healthy forest that provides habitat for hundreds of species. Forests  
come back, ecosystems return to health."

He continued, "We have the opportunity to protect this ecosystem  
on a landscape scale and buffer some of the negative effects of climate  
change at the local level. We don't know exactly what the changes  
will be in the next 50 or 100 years but there will be forests and healthy  
ecosystems if we engage in smart adaptive management."

The huge conservation project just completed in Monterey and  
Tyringham (see pp 6-7) provides that opportunity—with over 14,000  
acres of contiguous land now conserved, we can focus on managing  
it for maximum climate resilience.

I'm grateful for the efforts of Nick Pitel, Adam Galambos and our  
conservation team for bringing this project to completion, and grateful  
to have Doug at the helm of our amazing stewardship staff to care for  
this and all the BNRC-managed lands. And, I'm grateful to you, because  
you make this work possible.

Thank you.



Jenny with High Road Manager  
Deanna Smith and Conservation  
Manager Nick Pitel

Warmly,

Jenny Hansell, President  
[jhansell@bnrc.org](mailto:jhansell@bnrc.org)

# NEW NAMES AND FACES

## Meet the Newest Members of the BNRC Team

This last year has been marked by lots of growth and expansion at BNRC. You may encounter some new faces—both in the field and in the office. We're thrilled to welcome Nick Pitel and Sharon Hogan to the staff, as well as new board members Rachel Hailey and Brian Horan.

### **Rachel Hailey, Board Member**

Rachel is the Owner/Transformationalist at DEI Outdoors, a firm that deals directly with the outdoor industry to foster diversity, equity, and inclusion in organizations. Her main objective is to transform the outdoors into a diverse, equitable, inclusive, and accessible space. Rachel is committed to creating an industry where anyone can experience, thrive, and lead in the out-of-doors. Rachel is also a speaker and published author. She can often be found seeking magical creatures in the woods with her daughter and German shepherd.



### **Brian Horan, Board Member**

Brian is an attorney at Cain Hibbard & Myers, where he counsels and represents clients in high-stakes legal disputes in areas including real estate, health care, construction, and insurance. Brian previously devoted more than a decade to public service at the New York City Office of the Corporation Counsel. He received his BA from Columbia University and his JD from NYU School of Law, where he was an editor of the NYU Environmental Law Journal. Brian lives in Great Barrington with his wife and their two children.



### **Nick Pitel, Conservation Manager**

Nick grew up exploring the woods and waters around Otego, New York and became fascinated with nature at an early age. He received a BS in Field Biology from Paul Smith's College and an MS in Forest Ecology and Management from SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry. Nick has previously worked with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources, and the Columbia Land Conservancy. Nick has lived in the Berkshires since 2011 and is excited to work with local landowners and communities to protect and preserve important Berkshire landscapes.



### **Sharon Hogan, Director of Finance and Administration**

Sharon has a Master of Education from Boston University and an MBA in Finance from Northeastern University. She grew up in New York City, spent her college and graduate school years in Boston, and moved to Chapel Hill, North Carolina where she raised her three children and worked in finance and accounting with nonprofits and state agencies. Sharon returned to Boston and has spent the last ten years as a financial consultant for Massachusetts nonprofits. She loves the challenge of accounting and finance work and is very excited to be part of the team helping to preserve our wonderful Berkshire landscape. 🌲



## CELEBRATING URBAN BIRDS

It Takes a Neighborhood to Do Scientific Research

Birds in the city? Absolutely. Last year a snowy owl was seen for several weeks hanging out on rooftops in downtown Pittsfield. That's unusual, but plenty of birds make the city their home—from robins and blue jays to peregrine falcons and bald eagles, and plenty of less-common species as well.

BNRC is contributing to the collective scientific knowledge about where birds are nesting and what that tells us about changes in bird populations (an important indicator of environmental health) by working this spring with the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Celebrate Urban Birds (CUB) program.

Birdwatching offers a direct and enriching connection to the nature around us, wherever we may be. Watching birds and marveling at their agility, vocalizations, plumage, interactions, and antics takes little effort, and can make anyone and everyone a citizen scientist.

That is the goal of the CUB program: to get people involved in community science around a bird-watching assignment that can be done easily



by anyone anywhere, especially in urban locations. In addition to the scientific aspect of reporting observations, CUB celebrates neighborhood culture (as well as birds) by incorporating arts such as music, theater, dance, and storytelling into the program.

This year BNRC will pilot the CUB program in cooperation with selected community groups in the Berkshires. Participants will learn how to identify birds in their neighborhood, how to record their observations, and help plan and create related artistic projects. The program will culminate in a community celebration to showcase these projects, raise awareness of bird conservation, and generate excitement about contributing to a worthwhile endeavor. Stay tuned for more details!

Excited already? You can participate in Cornell's CUB program too. Instructions can be found at [celebrateurbanbirds.org/cub/instructions](https://celebrateurbanbirds.org/cub/instructions). 🐦

## NESTWATCH VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

Help us monitor nest boxes at a BNRC reserve for 4-week stints this spring and summer, as part of the NestWatch program at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology (CLO). By committing to check and report on a nest box each of three or four consecutive weeks, you'll be providing valuable data and adding to the store of knowledge that helps scientists study trends in bird populations.

During a short on-site training, you'll learn how to identify nests and record your observations each week for entry into the CLO's database. Contact Charlotte Hood at [chood@bnrc.org](mailto:chood@bnrc.org) to sign up.

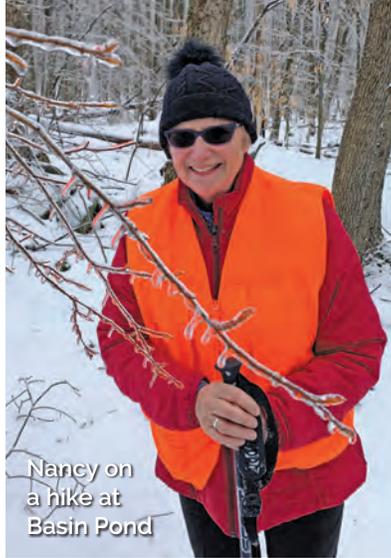
You can also monitor a nest on your property and report data by visiting [nestwatch.org](https://nestwatch.org).



## MEET NANCY KING!

Organist, Avid Biker,  
and BNRC Volunteer

Nancy has been a dedicated BNRC volunteer for five years: "I love [BNRC] for all it does to keep open land for everyone to enjoy in the Berkshires."



In 2022, 80 volunteers participated in volunteer programs at BNRC, accumulating over 600 hours across all roles. Nancy King has been a hard-working volunteer since 2018.

These wonderful volunteers provide support in many areas of the organization. Nancy fondly remembers her time helping out the opening of the Parsons Marsh trail, where she distributed wildflower seeds to the children in attendance and helped them decorate handmade hiking poles.

"To see whole families walking the trail and getting excited about nature was inspiring!" —NANCY KING

Nancy also serves as a volunteer Trail Steward at **Housatonic Flats** and **Thomas & Palmer Brook**, both in Great Barrington. As a Trail Steward, she hikes at her assigned property, and submits an online report about her observations on the trail. This report includes when and where she visited, how many English and Spanish language trail maps were restocked at the kiosk, and indicates any problems she may have encountered (downed trees, or issues with trash, as examples), so that BNRC staff can follow up and resolve the issue quickly. Reports from Trail Stewards like Nancy are essential to maintaining BNRC's 60+ miles of hiking trails.

Nancy also participates in volunteer workdays (see sidebar for more information). For Nancy, the two new bridges constructed last year across streams at **Basin Pond** in Lee were a significant improvement. Six volunteers supported this effort with BNRC staff by carrying wood from the trailhead to the building sites. The completion of these bridges has made the hike much safer—in fact, this hike is one of Nancy's favorites, so be sure to check it out! 🚶

"I am happy to do my part to keep the older trails in shape and to work on new ones."

—NANCY KING



### 2022 VOLUNTEER SNAPSHOT

80

volunteers

44

new volunteers

OVER

600

volunteer hours

OVER  
85

trail reports from  
Trail Stewards

25

Stewardship Team  
workdays

### VOLUNTEER WORKDAYS AT BNRC

Volunteers also support the BNRC Stewardship Team at scheduled workdays. These Stewardship workdays can include trail maintenance and construction, invasive species management, habitat restoration, repainting trail blazes, and more. In 2022, 25 of the volunteer workdays were stewardship-focused.



Learn more  
about, how you  
can help by visiting  
[bnrc.org/volunteer](https://bnrc.org/volunteer).



## GENEROUS LANDOWNERS PROTECT HABITAT TO BUILD CLIMATE RESILIENCE

Multi-parcel project links 14,000 acres of conserved land in Monterey and Tyringham

Thanks to several generous and conservation-minded landowners—and with partners that include BNRC donors, the Monterey Preservation Land Trust, and the Massachusetts Departments of Conservation & Recreation, Fish & Game, and Conservation Services—BNRC recently led an effort that has preserved woodlands, wildlands, open space, and water resources in Monterey and Tyringham.

The project places a string of parcels totaling over 750 acres into conservation. This includes large swaths of Core Habitat and Critical Natural Landscape, according to the Massachusetts Natural Heritage & Endangered Species program. The Nature Conservancy has also identified these lands as having above average climate adaptation characteristics.

These newly conserved parcels connect a total of 14,000 acres of preserved lands—a land area comparable in size to the island of Manhattan. This expanse includes BNRC's Steadman



Pond and Bob's Way reserves, the Mount Hunger reserve, and Beartown State Forest.

Over a mile of buildable frontage along Brace Road is included in the project, which will now remain unfragmented and undisturbed for wildlife. These lands are significant for both local indigenous and Shaker histories as well.

Fairview Hospital, of Berkshire Health Systems, was one of the other landowners involved in the deal. Anthony Rinaldi Jr., Executive Vice President at Fairview Hospital, said "Preserving this open space is a gift of health and wellness to the southern Berkshires. Alice Hanlon gave this land to Fairview, and with BNRC's help the land she loved will remain open, offering outdoor recreation and protection for the well-being of the many species that depend on this natural habitat."

The permanent conservation of these lands was possible thanks to \$3.27 million in funding

provided by the Nion Robert Thieriot Foundation, Amelia Peabody Charitable Fund, Bafflin Foundation, Feigenbaum Foundation, individual and anonymous donors, the Department of Conservation Services Landscape Partnership Grant, and bargain sales by landowners.

Peter Bray and Bridget Reel donated to the effort in memory of Bridget's father, Grenville "Bucky" Rogers. The project "conserves an unspoiled part of the Berkshires landscape that has a special importance to us since we stayed in Tyringham on our first visit to the Berkshires in 1983," wrote Peter. "We immediately fell in love with the Berkshires' rolling hills, historic towns and cultural offerings. It has become our favorite place on earth."

"When my children were young, we hiked Mt. Hunger regularly in all four seasons," adds Jon Sylbert, longtime president of the Monterey Preservation Land Trust (MPLT). "Exploring the Ledges was particularly exciting because they could crawl inside—through the interior shelves—and return to daylight from a gap further along." MPLT's addition of the Mount Hunger reserve to this corridor is key to realizing the connectivity potential that made this opportunity so special.

"Projects like this illustrate the best of what the BNRC community can do together," said Jenny Hansell, BNRC president. "Generous, conservation-minded landowners, donors, partner organizations, state agencies, helpful attorneys, great staff, and thoughtful volunteers work together to make something like this happen."

*Stay tuned for news in future seasons on improved and new trails that you'll be able to visit for free in the Tyringham Valley/Mount Hunger corridor. Thank you to all BNRC donors for making this project possible, for the sake of all living things that enjoy and need the Berkshires. 🌲*

## ARE YOU INTERESTED IN CONSERVING LAND YOU OWN?

Learn about your conservation options at [bnrc.org/landkeepers](https://bnrc.org/landkeepers).



## EPHEMERAL ENJOYMENTS

In the Berkshires, the special springtime weather season is short! Whether you're looking to spot trillium or trout lily, or just see that baby green before the region's lush summer, check out these spots for the freshest air and liveliest birdsongs of the year.

### Hoosac Range | North Adams



A 3-mile ridge trail (6 miles roundtrip) atop the Berkshires' northeastern wall, the Spruce Hill 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. Spruce Hill is a strenuous hike due to length and terrain. The Sunset Rock portion of the trail is moderate due to elevation change. Winter can hang on at Hoosac Range—be prepared! *Take Route 2 east from North Adams. Find the parking area on your right, just past Wigwam Cabins after the hairpin turn.*

### The Boulders | Pittsfield/Dalton/Lanesborough



Located close to Berkshire County's population center, the 645 acres of The Boulders provide more than six miles of trails across four routes. 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 offer a vista to the west, are found atop the Blue Trail—directly accessed from the parking area near the junction of Hubbard Avenue and Dalton Avenue (Route 8/9). *Enter the reserve from the east side of Gulf Road in Dalton, opposite the parking for the Appalachian Trail. Or use the trailhead and parking on Dalton Avenue in Pittsfield: directly across from the intersection with Hubbard Avenue. Four trails range from easy to moderate difficulty.*



Support the Berkshire outdoors.  
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### Basin Pond | Lee



Basin Pond's trails lead across streams and cascades, through a boulder-strewn natural amphitheater, to a beaver pond and the site of two long-gone man-made dams. With new access improvements hikers can enjoy Basin Pond's 296 acres by taking the loop trail or walking the more direct route to the pond via the lower trail.

A striking feature of the reserve—which abuts October Mountain State Forest—is its lacework of streams, large and small, that course down the south-facing hill. *Take Route 20 east from Lee. Left on Becket Road. Trailhead parking is approximately 0.25 miles ahead on left. Trails are moderate in difficulty.*

### Thomas & Palmer Brook | Great Barrington



The 267 acres of the Thomas & Palmer Brook reserve slope upward from the brook through old pasture, a wetland, and mature forest to a dramatic high point of exposed bedrock. An accessible trail through the meadow leads into the forest, winding past boulders and large sugar maple trees. The Woodland Trail climbs through forest to a narrow hiking trail ending at Whale Rock. Birds attracted by the property's

diverse habitats include the American woodcock, the blue-winged warbler, the chestnut-sided warbler, the eastern towhee and the purple finch. *Parking is located between 301 and 309 State Road (Route 23) in Great Barrington, across from the Koi Restaurant. Three trails range from accessible to moderate difficulty.*

### Whiting River | New Marlborough



Off the beaten path: no formal parking or trails exist at this 45-acre reserve just west of Campbell Falls State Park. Yet access to the river and its fish are only a short scramble downhill from Campbell Falls Road. If you can find a way to the hillside south of the river, it's lovely, and tucked up against the Connecticut border. For those comfortable navigating in the unmarked wild, especially ones with flies and a line to wet: go feel like a kid again. *A pull-off opposite 240 Campbell Falls Road, New Marlborough, provides the best access. Rough terrain.*

### 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](http://bnrc.org/reserves). Or download the BNRC Berkshire Trails app at [bnrc.org/app](http://bnrc.org/app).

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



## BEYOND YOKUN RIDGE

Planning the Future of The High Road

Now that the Yokun Ridge leg of The High Road is open, BNRC President Jenny Hansell asked High Road Manager Deanna Smith about the future of BNRC's ambitious countywide trail network.

**Jenny Hansell: Everyone keeps asking me, where will the next segment be?**

Deanna Smith: All I can say now is that there are three priority segments that we have made significant progress on, in North, Central, and South County.

**JH: Why can't you say where they are?**

DS: Most High Road routes will cross the land of multiple landowners and will require legal agreements with them. We're still in negotiations with several of the landowners, so being too specific right now isn't in anyone's best interest. There are many layers to this type of project management: approvals, permitting, trail design, easements—and that's not even the actual construction! And of course, we want the trail to be ready for hikers—the last thing we want is folks coming to hike a trail that hasn't been built yet!

**JH: Can you share an example of a route you're working on? When it's complete, what kind of experience will it be?**

DS: There's a beautiful route in Central Berkshire County that I'm most excited about, because it really ticks all the boxes of what we hope to achieve with The High Road. It will be a collaboration among five landowners and provide a new type of experience for hikers, in close proximity to downtown Pittsfield. This route has excellent views, wetlands, and some incredible rock outcroppings—everything you can hope for in a trail.

**JH: Why did you choose this route?**

DS: The goal is to bridge the gap between the existing Yokun Ridge trail and downtown Pittsfield. For the intrepid hiker who plans on walking the



entire route, it will provide additional miles through unique terrain and provide an option to enter downtown. We're conscious of how the design and construction of this particular trail might be geared more toward more novice trail users, to provide a top-tier introduction to hiking for a wider audience. This trail will become a showcase for what we can accomplish with The High Road.

**JH: Can you say a little about how we work with our partners?**

DS: All of these routes will require collaboration from a wide range of stakeholders, and not just landowners. Town planning departments, funders, and community groups are all involved in the various stages of project development for each High Road route.

**JH: How does conservation play a role?**

DS: As BNRC pursues new conservation projects, it widens the canvas for what might be possible for The High Road, and new land acquisitions may open the door to new trail connections. The High Road can serve many functions—recreation, access, education. There's so much potential, and new conservation projects help make that happen. For example, the new conservation work going on around Mt. Hunger in Monterey and Tyringham (see page 6) creates exciting potential for a future High Road route through existing BNRC and state lands.

**JH: When do you think we'll unveil the next one officially?**

DS: I don't think I'm being too optimistic by saying that we'll have an announcement in mid-2023, with new trails ready to be opened in 2024. 🌲

# Many Ways to Give Generously

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

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

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

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](https://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](https://freewill.com/bnrc).**

**Donate cryptocurrency.** Crypto donors typically avoid capital gains tax, are able to deduct the full amount of their donation, and can then repurchase standing in the donated asset if they choose. **Be part of BNRC's crypto team at [bnrc.org/donatecrypto](https://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 contribute cash. This 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](https://bnrc.org/donate).**

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

Questions? Contact Rich Montone at [rmontone@bnrc.org](mailto:rmontone@bnrc.org), or 413-499-0596 x114





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# Expanding Access to Nature

Would you like to see more of the land, wildlife, farms, and outdoor access that BNRC donors protect every day? Check out two new BNRC brochures that highlight how everyone can experience the beauty of the Berkshire outdoors.

## **Berkshire County Trails**

**for All** features six ADA-accessible trails throughout the Berkshires.

## **Everybody Can Hike**

offers beginner-friendly information on what to bring, what to expect, and how to stay safe on the trails.

