

FALL 2026

THE BNRC Report

2030 STRATEGIC PLAN EDITION

2026
Impact
Report
INSIDE

BERKSHIRE NATURAL RESOURCES COUNCIL

Be a part of our
next chapter | **A Bold Vision for the Berkshires**

THE BNRC Report

FALL 2026

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**Berkshire Natural
Resources Council**

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Letter from the President

BUILDING WHAT COMES NEXT

This issue of the BNRC Report is a special one. It introduces our new strategic plan—a forward-looking guide for how we will care for the Berkshires in the years ahead. I'm excited to share it with you.

Across our region, we see how quickly conditions are changing. Each day reminds us why this work matters and how important it is to our shared future. This plan is our response: a commitment to meet this moment with clarity, purpose, and a readiness to do more.

In the coming years, we will focus on protecting the places that matter most, caring for the lands entrusted to us, and expanding access to the outdoors. We are also deepening our commitment to community—ensuring more people feel connected to this work and have opportunities to take part. Underlying it all is a focus on strengthening BNRC so we can serve the region effectively for generations to come.

Partnership is central to everything we will do. This work depends on landowners, farmers, municipalities, community organizations, and supporters like you working together toward a shared vision for the Berkshires.

For nearly 60 years, this community has shown up with care and support. That shared commitment is what allows us to look ahead with confidence.

I hope the pages ahead offer a clear sense of where we're going—and how you can be part of it. Thank you for being with us.

Warmly,

Jenny Hansell, President

jhansell@bnrc.org



Celebrating a new BNRC trail opening! Left to right: Dr. Eve Schlüter, Deputy Director of MassWildlife; Jenny Hansell; Casey Pease, Director of Communications for Senator Paul Mark; and John Mancia, BNRC Board Chair.



A Bold Vision for the Berkshires

The Berkshires are changing. Climate impacts are intensifying. Land is under pressure. Communities are evolving. In this moment, **BNRC is stepping forward with a renewed commitment** and a bold new level of ambition.

At the heart of our new strategic plan is a clear and steady goal: advancing climate resilience across the Berkshires. That focus has long guided our work. Now, it calls us to go further.

This plan **builds on decades of conservation success** and reflects strong confidence in BNRC's ability to deliver real, lasting results. It also recognizes that the challenges ahead require more collaboration than ever before. Together with our partners across the county, state, and region, we are protecting forests, farmland, and fresh water. Caring for the lands and waters already conserved. Expanding access to the outdoors. Building a stronger, more inclusive outdoor community. And strengthening BNRC itself so we can serve this region for generations to come.

In the pages ahead, you'll read more about the **five strategies guiding our work** and how they will shape the future of conservation in our region.

We invite you to **be part of this next chapter.**

CONSERVING THE LANDS THAT SUSTAIN US

The forests, farms, wetlands, and trails of Berkshire County are the foundation of our region's character and resilience.

BNRC is committed to conserving 10,000 new acres of land by 2030. This ambitious goal aligns with statewide conservation priorities and reflects close collaboration with our land protection partners.

To achieve this goal, BNRC will:

- **Preserve parcels critical for landscape-level conservation.**
- **Expand key BNRC reserves** to increase public access.
- **Raise awareness among landowners and communities** about options available to protect the lands they care about.

Science-Driven Strategy

To reach our ambitious goals, we are accelerating the pace of conservation. We have developed a sophisticated computer model of every parcel in the county that enables us to focus on the most significant areas for biodiversity, agriculture, and recreation.

Conserving What Matters

A significant shift in land ownership is on the horizon, as many landowners will "age out" over the next decade. BNRC is working with and supporting landowners as they make critical decisions about the future of their land.

Wildlife Linkages

By focusing on critical areas, BNRC is protecting the "highways" that wildlife—from salamanders to moose—need to move safely across the landscape.

Multigenerational Farmland

Keeping farmland in farming requires more than protecting it from development—it also needs to remain affordable and accessible to future farmers. BNRC supports efforts to protect Berkshire farmland, facilitate generational transitions, and sustain a resilient regional food system. 🌱

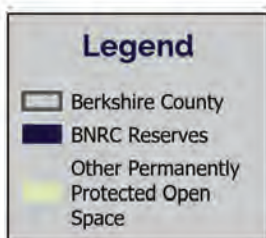


Berkshire County

Ridgetop Forests,
Wildlife Habitat,
Important
Farmland →

Connected
Corridors
for Plants,
Wildlife, and
People ←

Floodplain
Forest
Habitat,
Prime
Farmland,
Forest
Biodiversity ←



0 2.5 5
Miles

Sources: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, ©OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community, MassGIS, Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, Esri, NASA, NGA, USGS

Do you
own land
in the
Berkshires?
Let's talk.



If you have forest, farmland, or open space in the Berkshires, we'd love to start a conversation. Whether you're ready to explore conservation or just want to learn about your options, BNRC is here to help protect the land you cherish for generations to come.

Visit bnrc.org/get-involved or call 413-499-0596 to fill out a property inquiry form, learn more, or explore conservation options for your land.





Greater landscape diversity creates more resilience. From the soil layer to the top of the canopy, we are managing for a forest that can weather the future.

STRATEGY II

STEWARDING LANDS AND WATERS FOR A CHANGING CLIMATE

Conserving land is only the first step. Through thoughtful stewardship, BNRC ensures that the land and water entrusted to us remain healthy and rich in plant and animal life for generations to come.

With each new parcel we conserve, we will implement management practices that strengthen biodiversity and climate resilience. At the same time, we will increase our support to private landowners by providing information, tools, and guidance to help them make the best possible choices about caring for their forests and fields. Working together, we can improve ecological health across the Berkshires.

To advance this work, BNRC will:

- **Invest in the management of BNRC-owned properties**, using science-based practices that support habitat diversity and forest health.
- **Work with partners** to develop and share practical tools and resources to help individual landowners manage their lands for greater ecological health.
- **Maintain BNRC trails with care and consistency**, protecting the long-term sustainability of our reserves while upholding our high standards for clear navigation and visitor safety.

With 27,000 acres under our care, we focus our energy where it matters most:

- **Rare Habitats**

Protecting high-value natural communities.

- **Where People Gather**

Maintaining trails for better access, and to educate and inspire.

- **Where the Line is Thin**

Acting early to detect and control invasive species before they spread.

Parsons Marsh: Restoring a Healthy Habitat

Parsons Marsh is beloved for its scenic, accessible boardwalk. It's also a vital habitat for diverse plant and wildlife communities. Thanks to the generosity of a longtime BNRC member, we can push back against invasive species that threaten the reserve's health.

Over the next several seasons, you'll see our team and partners methodically removing species like multiflora rose, Japanese knotweed, and round-leaf bittersweet—allowing native plants to take their place. Once the plant community is healthier, the birds and animals will follow. 🌱

COMMON INVASIVES AT PARSONS MARSH



MULTIFLORA ROSE
Rosa multiflora

Deciduous shrub, white flowers, red fruit. Brought from Asia and planted as a "living fence."

WHY IT'S A PROBLEM HERE
Forms dense thickets in fields that crowd out other species. Fruit is not nutritious for wildlife.

WHAT YOU'RE SEEING NOW
A dense thicket of Multiflora Rose, a highly invasive and fiercely competitive species that crowds out native plants and poses a direct threat to the delicate ecological balance of the marsh.



Stewardship isn't about controlling nature; it is intentional management to give it a fighting chance. Sustainable stewardship is about making the long-term choices today that help establish these habitats for the next generations.

STRATEGY III

EXPANDING ACCESS AND CONNECTING PEOPLE TO THE OUTDOORS

Trails offer space to walk, reflect, gather, and recharge.

BNRC is committed to making it easier and safer for people across Berkshire County to connect with the outdoors.

By 2030, BNRC will:

Expand the High Road to 30 miles of trails, growing this regional network to support towns, tourism, and the local economy.

Add three new accessible trails where they are needed most, doubling the number on our reserves.

Collaborate with private landowners and local land trusts, bringing our expertise and resources to enable others to improve equitable access across the region.

Together, we can ensure that the benefits of conserved land are shared by all.



The High Road and trail connectors represent the future of regional collaboration. Working together, we're creating a trail network that supports local communities and reflects the shared values of the Berkshires.

THE HIGH ROAD

A vision of a connected community



30 Miles by 2030

Great Barrington Community Connector

The five-mile-long Connector links BNRC's Threemile Hill and Thomas & Palmer Brook reserves, creating a continuous off-road route between two well-loved conserved properties. Through new trail construction, strategic use of existing paths, and a trail easement with the Town of Great Barrington, the project links town to trail and provides more ways for town residents to access the outdoors. The project is a collaboration with the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, Berkshire South Community Center, and the Town of Great Barrington, built around a shared vision for a more connected community.

Cross-County Connector

The Cross-County Connector will establish a key east-west link between major north-south routes, including the Taconic Crest Trail and the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail. The nine-mile route will connect BNRC's Boulders Reserve with Mount Greylock, helping create a more cohesive, regionally significant trail system.

Close collaboration with the Town of Lanesborough ensures the Connector serves both local community needs and BNRC's regional trail goals.

2030 and Beyond

BNRC is working to advance the next generation of High Road connections across the Berkshires. Priorities include extending the Yokun ridgeline route south into West Stockbridge and beyond; building on Tom Ball Mountain Reserve to connect north along the ridge and west toward Alford Springs; and linking the Hoosac Range Reserve with downtown North Adams and, eventually, Adams to the south. 

STRATEGY IV

BUILDING A STRONGER, MORE INCLUSIVE OUTDOOR COMMUNITY

Conservation is strongest when everyone feels welcome in the outdoors.

BNRC is working to ensure that more people across Berkshire County, especially in urban and historically underserved communities, can connect with nature.

BNRC will also serve as a hub for land stewardship volunteers across Berkshire County, working with conservation partners to connect people with opportunities to care for conserved lands and build greater stewardship capacity throughout the region.



To advance this goal, BNRC will:

- **Develop educational programs** designed in partnership with communities in urban and underserved areas.
- **Support municipalities** with park and recreation resources that enhance local outdoor spaces.
- **Grow and sustain a strong, county-wide volunteer corps**, empowering more people to take an active role in stewardship.



Trails For All

BNRC is committed to developing more universally accessible or **All Persons** trails in Berkshire County. These trails have a gentle grade and firm, stable surfaces that allow for easier use of mobility devices and strollers so people of all ages and abilities can enjoy nature.

Visit Accessible Reserves:

Parsons Marsh in Lenox, Old Mill Trail in Hinsdale/Dalton, Thomas & Palmer Brook in Great Barrington

Who Is the Outdoors For? Everyone.

Forest paths, mountain views, neighborhood parks, and quiet rivers should feel safe and welcoming to everyone. Conservation is not only about protecting land—it's about ensuring that people of all backgrounds, identities, and abilities can experience and care for it.

Through partnered programs with **Seeing Rainbows** and **Q-MoB (Queer Men of Berkshire)**, we are strengthening connections with the LGBTQ+ community and creating affirming spaces in nature. Our continued partnership with **Mixed Faces Wild Spaces** fosters belonging and representation in the outdoors. And through initiatives like the Accessible Birding Walk with Dave Edson, we are expanding opportunities for people of varying abilities to explore conserved lands with confidence and support. 🌈



Together, we're building a conservation movement that reflects the full diversity and spirit of the Berkshires.



BUILDING A STRONG FOUNDATION FOR THE FUTURE



To meet the challenges ahead—and to deliver on the bold goals of this strategic plan—BNRC must be strong, resilient, and sustainable as an organization.



Our ability to deliver lasting impact depends on a strong organizational foundation. That means investing in the people, resources, and systems that power our work.

To lead with confidence today and ensure a solid future, we will:

- **Strengthen BNRC's financial foundation** by diversifying revenue sources, growing annual giving, and launching a large-scale campaign to support long-term sustainability.
- **Invest in our team and board**, fostering engagement, empowerment, and shared purpose so those leading and carrying out this work feel supported and inspired.
- **Deepen our commitment to volunteers** by embedding these values more fully in our internal culture and external partnerships.

By building a strong organizational foundation, we ensure that BNRC can continue protecting the Berkshires and serving our community for generations to come. 

Above left: Latinas413 stop for photo op at The Boulders.



BNRC has protected the places that define the Berkshires for nearly 60 years. With shared vision, **strong partnerships**, and your **continued support**, we are ready to meet the challenges ahead.



Clockwise from left:
The Greenagers crew collaborate on stonework along The High Road's Great Barrington Community Connector route; Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) members explore the history at Old Mill Trail; BNRC volunteers secure new bridging at Thomas & Palmer Brook.



Thank You

Everything accomplished across the Berkshires this year— from conserved forests and working farmland to protecting wildlife and ensuring free access to trails and community programs—happened because of our incredible community of supporters. Your dedication and generosity drive this work forward. Here is a snapshot of the stories, places, and projects you made possible.

ADDING IT UP: OUR COLLECTIVE IMPACT

BNRC thrives because of members like **YOU**. These numbers are proof of the impact donors, volunteers, partners, and neighbors create together. Thank you for making it happen!

COMMUNITY FUNDED

\$2,192,961 raised

in FY26 (July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026)

CONSERVING FOR THE
COMMUNITY

1,170 acres

protected CY25 (8 properties)



IMPROVING THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE

To make our reserves more welcoming, we:

- **Improved 6 parking lots**
- **Added 10 new kiosks**
- **Installed 17 trail counters**

to track reserve use

*Funded by the Massachusetts
Office of Travel & Tourism and the
Jane & Jack Fitzpatrick Trust*

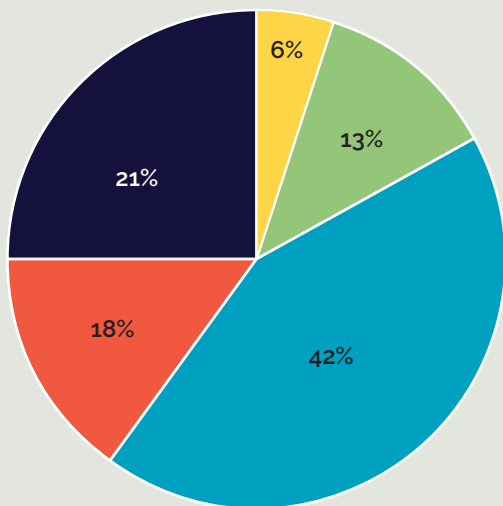
CONNECTING COMMUNITY

15+ miles of High Road trails

The High Road's newest route, the Great Barrington Community Connector opened in Fall 2026!

Expenses

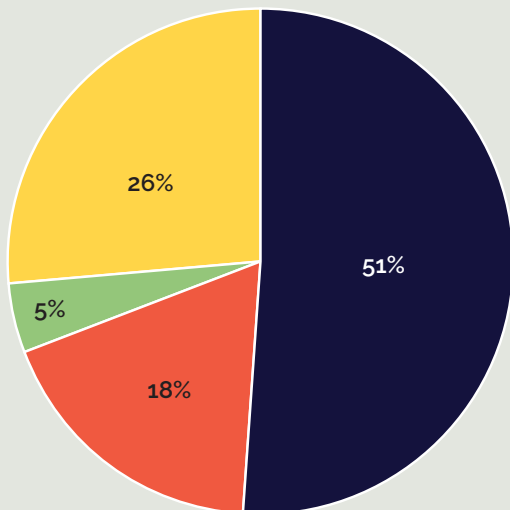
Community Engagement	176,248
Administration	353,986
Land Conservation*	506,684
Development/Fundraising	575,769
Stewardship & Public Access	1,175,937
Total	\$2,788,624



*Fund expended on Stewardship parking and trail upgrades: \$500,000

Income

Unrestricted Donations	1,417,465
Project Donations & Grants	498,676
Government Awards	126,401
Reserves & Earned Income	722,569
Total	\$2,765,111



Financial numbers are from FY26, July 1, 2025 - June 30, 2026, and are unaudited. For audited financials, please contact the BNRC office or visit www.bnrc.org.



Roots Rising farm crew hikes The Boulders.

COMMUNITY ACCESS

155,000+ visitors
to BNRC reserves annually

COMMUNITY SUPPORTED

- **49 volunteers** monitored BNRC trails, assisted with trail construction and maintenance, and more!
- **1,043 individual donors** supported our work
- **120 donors** gave monthly sustaining gifts

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

40 programs in FY26 and
790+ program participants



Author and forester Ethan Tapper presents at BNRC's Forests Close to Home conference.



Berkshire Natural Resources Council

309 Pittsfield Road, Suite B
Lenox, MA 01240

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