

# RIVER WALK SUMMARY HIGHLIGHTS

Housatonic River Walk is a riverside greenway in the downtown center of Great Barrington, Massachusetts, located along south Berkshire County's most severely abused riverbank. After more than a century of neglect, River Walk restores the Housatonic River to the community by engaging local youth and volunteers in this community-built and managed greenway and trail. Since 1988, 2300 community volunteers have engaged in reclaiming a riverbank once abandoned to PCB contamination. They have recreated native habitat, secured public access, removed 400+ tons of debris, and provided a half-mile of artfully crafted riverside walking trail and canoe access. With Greenagers now its community caretakers, River Walk is nurturing the next generation of environmental stewards. The Great Barrington Land Conservancy administers the trail and manages its conservation easements on behalf of the local community.

## Highlights

- **Reclaimed** south Berkshire County's **most devastated section of Housatonic riverbank** and developed **one-half mile of recreational river access**.
- To date (since 1988): **3000 volunteers** contributed **26,000 hours** to the project.
- **10,000+ visitations** annually.
- Ongoing **restoration of 2.63 acres of riverfront** with intensive native plantings and exotic invasives control. Since 1994, planted **15,000+ native plants and shrubs (more than 150 species)**, rescued from construction sites or propagated from locally collected Berkshire seed.
- **75 species of birds** sited.
- Ongoing **riverbank stabilization** utilizing bioengineering techniques and native plant restoration (**750 linear feet of bank to date**).
- **Showcase methods of natural resource protection**—native plant vegetative buffers, invasive-exotic plant control, compost tea soil enhancements, local non-toxic trail materials, flowforms, and non-point source pollution controls with rain gardens, drop inlets, and permeable trail surfaces.
- **Horticultural tutorials and onsite training**. Each year 50+ Greenagers and other student volunteers acquire a working knowledge of botany, New England forest dynamics, plant identification, invasive plant management, and water management, while learning the skills needed to care for River Walk's reclaimed native landscape.

May, 2017

## Timeline

- 1988 Project begins with Denny Alsop Riverbank Clean-up—16 volunteers remove 15 tons accumulated rubbish and demolition debris from riverbank behind Community Land Trust at 195 Main Street.
- 1991 Housatilla Float: Flotilla of 50 decorated boats parade down the Housatonic River to celebrate riverbank cleanup, led by Mahican Native American representatives.
- 1992 Housatonic River Walk trail (136 feet) opens to the public. New sections are added each year.
- 1999 One-half mile of River Walk trail is open to the public.
- 2002 Downstream River Park is named for civil rights leader W.E.B. Du Bois. Son David Graham Du Bois is featured speaker.
- 2006 Du Bois River Park named a site on the Upper Housatonic Valley African American Heritage Trail.
- 2006 William Stanley Overlook recognizes the electrical engineer's alternating-current advances. Grandson George C. Stanley is featured speaker.
- 2009 National Park Service designates River Walk a National Recreation Trail.
- 2011 River Walk contracts the Greenagers to manage the River Walk site on a permanent basis.
- 2012 River Walk celebrates 25 years of clean up and trail making activities and recognizes Greenagers, its future community stewards. Unveils permanent outdoor exhibit *W.E.B. Du Bois: Champion of Rivers*.

River Walk has received dozens of awards of distinction from the Garden Club of America, American Rivers, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, among others.