

# RIVER WALK 2017 HIGHLIGHTS

For a fifth year, River Walk contracted local Greenagers to serve as community caretakers. Onsite teaching and training support their work and give teens the skills they need to implement trail and ecological improvements. The Great Barrington Land Conservancy continues to administer the trail and manage its conservation easements on behalf of the local community.

The hands-on training component of our program was especially vital to River Walk this year, which marked the second phases of two challenging three-year field programs along River Walk's downstream section. A riverbank stabilization program funded by the town's Community Preservation Act reinforces 130 linear feet (3250 sf) of especially steep and vulnerable riverbank, using soil bioengineering. A partnership with adjacent property The Berkshire enables extensive riparian habitat improvements on 17 individual areas (8185 sf total).

A summary of accomplishments:

- Conducted **6 outdoor kinetic learning programs/field training** for **73** middle school students (Monument Valley Middle School, Mount Everett Middle Schools, and Muddy Brook Middle School), Greenagers and apprentices and **24 hours of field training** for River Walk's two apprentices.
- Provided **9 e-birding programs** during the spring migratory season for **32** participants.
- Conducted several new public programs, including a **Worldwide March for Science, Riverside Music Connects, National Trails Day Explorations, Greenagers Orientation Day, Tree Walk** with Tom Ingersoll, **Riverside Trails Forum** with Peter Jensen, and **Heritage Walks** for **365** participants.
- Conducted **9 on-site service learning programs: 145 volunteers** contributed **268 on-site hours**, including volunteer services provided by Greenagers, Berkshire Bank, Simon's Rock at Bard, Monument Valley Middle School, Mount Everett Middle Schools, and Muddy Brook Middle School. Contracted **Greenager crews** provided **128** paid hours. **Three paid interns** and Trail Master Elia Del Molino provided **390+** paid hours.
- **Managed and improved 0.5 mile of recreational river access:** trail grooming for safety and attractiveness; repairs to trail cribbing, surfaces, and split rail fencing.
- Continued ongoing **restoration of 2.63 acres of riverfront** with extensive native plantings and exotic invasives control. Removed garlic mustard, Japanese knotweed, goutweed, bindweed, Norway maple seedlings and stump sprouts, oriental bittersweet, grape vines, brambles, and other **invasive-exotics**. Planted **40 native plants**. In the **special downstream mitigation area**, controlled canary reed grass, prepared and maintained 11 areas for planting, and planted **856 live stakes, 509 trees and shrubs, and 266 herbaceous plants**.
- Continued to encourage tender regrowth of plantings of *Asclepias syriacus* (common milkweed) for native **Monarch butterfly habitat** in response to acute decline of Monarch numbers
- Installed two rows of **200 new linear feet of down slope riverbank reinforcement** at the north Berkshire Corporation section, using bioengineering techniques; backfilled with compost and revegetated the bank with **226 live stakes and 300 herbaceous plants**. Monitored and continued re-vegetation of existing 750 linear feet of downslope reinforcement.
- In total, **2197 native plants, live stakes, shrubs, and trees** were purchased, propagated or donated.
- Accommodated approximately **12,000 visitations** by locals and tourists

- We value all our contributors large and small. In 2017, we received and administered grants (\$500+) from Project Native, Katherine L. W. and Winthrop M. Crane III Charitable Foundation, 79 Bridge Street Realty, Housatonic Heritage, The Roy Foundation, Town of Great Barrington Human Services and Community Preservation Act, and Berkshire Natural Resources Council. This support helped to maintain the trail for public recreation, to protect natural resources connected to the Housatonic River, and to nurture a new generation of young stewards, by providing job skills and on-site educational opportunities impossible to duplicate in conventional classroom environments.