

GREAT BARRINGTON HOUSATONIC RIVER WALK

April 13, 2011

Motorized-use Policy

The Great Barrington Housatonic River Walk is a half-mile public riverside greenway trail in two sections, located in downtown Great Barrington. Over the course of two and a half decades, 2300+ volunteers have reclaimed south Berkshire County's most severely abused riverbank and returned the river to its rightful place as a vibrant part of the community. Important to its mission is to ensure public safety and to implement natural resource protection—native plant vegetative buffers, invasive-exotic plant control, local non-toxic trail materials, non-point source pollution controls, and permeable trail surfaces.

River Walk easements are granted in appreciation of volunteer clean-up activities and managed by the Great Barrington Land Conservancy.

River Walk is open to the public for passive, non-motorized recreation.

River Walk has determined that it cannot construct trails in certain areas that are safe for motorized or manually operated vehicle/device (MMOV) use, regardless of the type of vehicle or device. It is unfeasible for River Walk to establish an environment in which an MMOV can be operated safely and without risk of serious harm.

River Walk cannot allow MMOV recreation on its lands because:

- MMOVs present a potential threat of erosion to the riverbank;
- MMOVs require an expensive, engineered trailway structure in order to safely traverse River Walk's steep and fragile riverbank;
- MMOVs present a nuisance and potential hazard to other users of the resource in that existing trails are not of sufficient width to allow vehicles and pedestrians to pass simultaneously; and
- River Walk's lands are burdened with conservation easements whose donors forbid (explicitly or implicitly) the recreational-use of MMOVs. These easements are held by the Great Barrington Land Conservancy.

In recognition that the mobility-impaired have a right to enjoy the natural world, River Walk has taken steps to allow limited use of MMOVs in certain areas.

- MMOV access limited to manual and electric powered wheelchairs is permitted on River Walk's downstream section, where the trail traverses the top of the riverbank, and within the W.E.B. Du Bois River Garden park. Operators of such vehicles/devices must show proof of mobility disability from a governmental licensing agency for permission.
- The use of other power devices such as bicycles or ATVs are not appropriate anywhere on the River Walk due to the negative impacts these devices have on the trail resource. Of greatest concern is that surface damage incurred by power devices such as bicycles or ATVs would render the trail impassable to manual and electric powered wheelchair users.
- No MMOV access is permitted on River Walk's upstream section, where the trail is built into the steep riverbank.

To effect this motorized-use policy, River Walk staff will post regulatory signage at access points (either "no motorized or manually operated vehicles permitted" or "limited use of manual and electric powered wheelchairs permitted"); closure of access through gates, signage, and careful construction of trailheads; attempts to meet with violators to discuss the policy and its reason for being; and legal action against frequent/egregious violators.