**Wachusett Greenways 2020 Annual Report**

**Navigating through Covid Times**

In 2020, Wachusett Greenways focused on safely navigating trail activity during the Covid-19 pandemic. This year the community especially benefitted from the Mass Central Rail Trail. Some trail users found this accessible, close to home, treasured resource for the first time. Wachusett Greenways is grateful to every trail user who is wearing a mask and distancing on the trail.

**26 Years of Connecting the Community through Partnerships**

From the beginning, the Wachusett Greenways team has shared the mission to welcome everyone to enjoy the outdoors through trails in our region. This year Wachusett Greenways attained 26 years of connecting the community as an all-volunteer nonprofit partnership of community supporters, town and state government, local foundations and businesses. In 2020, the board continues working to ensure that the Mass Central Rail Trail is accessible. The board is focusing on diversity, equity and inclusion on the trail, in its board, among its volunteers and in its projects.

**Trail Stewardship with Amazing Volunteers**

WG concentrated on stewardship of the Mass Central Rail Trail throughout this year of distanced contact. Dedicated volunteers were fundamental for trail maintenance. Very small teams, masked and distanced, carried out mowing, tree removal, brush cutting and drainage clearing. WG volunteers with special machinery completed some trail erosion and parking lot repairs. WG added several granite benches to the MCRT. Community and school groups, which WG relied on in prior years, will be a wonderful support when they resume volunteering in the future. Some town DPWs experienced staff reduction making them less available to participate with heavier trail maintenance.

**Partner Town Support**

Wachusett Greenways thanks the citizens, select board members, town administrators and managers of our regional towns for their support for the Mass Central Rail Trail. In 2020, the towns, Barre, Holden, Oakham, Paxton, Princeton, Sterling and West Boylston, contributed toward Wachusett Greenways annual operating expenses. Despite the pandemic, some Towns still participated with mowing and special maintenance projects.

**Key East-West Commonwealth Corridor**

Commonwealth agencies and other groups continue to construct more of the 104 mile MCRT between Northampton and Boston. In the central region, WG and our partners are working to complete the remaining ten miles of the central 30-mile section of this multi-use trail, for recreation, transportation and health. In 2020, Wachusett Greenways advanced construction on the Mass Central Rail Trail with grant support from the DCR Recreational Trails Program and the new MassTrails Program. The WG partnership with the DCR Watershed Division continued. We completed MCRT reconstruction in Holden for the connector section between River Street and Manning Street including the addition of an accessible-grade bypass. WG progressed on construction of the 0.8 mile section in West Boylston along old Pleasant Street between Route 140/Beaman Street and Prescott Street.

MCRT projects now underway for 2021 and beyond include surface restoration in West Boylston between Thomas Street and I-190, new construction of the 1.9 mile section in Holden from Mill Street to Princeton Street, replacement of the bridge in Sterling at the Quag/West Washacum and reconstruction of the trail for accessibility in Rutland at Whitehall Road. Another future set of MCRT projects, which WG is planning, includes reconstruction in Holden between Manning Street and Route 31 at Mill Street with accessible grades and constructing the missing link in Rutland at Miles Road.

**Events on Hold**

Trail events were on hold during the 2020 pandemic, as Wachusett Greenways awaits a safer time to gather. Wachusett Greenways cancelled the scheduled May annual meeting, intended to celebrate WG’s 25th anniversary. Finally, in December, WG held a small virtual annual meeting. When gatherings can occur in the future, we anticipate celebrating a Wachusett Greenways landmark birthday at the Mass Central Rail Trail.

**Think Positive!**

Just as 2020 closed, on January 16, 2021, Eric Johansen passed away. Wachusett Greenways benefitted from Eric Johansen’s support from the beginning in 1994, and he continued to encourage making the Mass Central Rail Trail and open spaces accessible to all. Eric was a powerful inspiration and encourager for the whole community. His ‘Think Positive’ (thumbs up) sticker on the pink bumper of his red ‘EJ’s Painting’ truck was the cue to return his big smile and wave as we passed. He took time to build up EVERYONE, and he offered his enthusiastic leadership and humble support for a wonderful variety of community services.

**Every Wachusett Greenways Donor Counts!**

Thank you to each supporter who contributed to Wachusett Greenways in 2020. New donors and loyal members are key. The total number of donors for the year reached 860 including 49 new members. Donors came from 128 different towns and 22 different states.

Wachusett Greenways welcomes every member. In addition, Wachusett Greenways has three special Mass Central Rail Trail Funds: 1) MCRT Construction Fund, 2) Edward P. Yaglou MCRT Maintenance Fund, 3) MCRT Stewardship Endowment Fund. Donors are invited to designate their gifts to any of these funds to help complete the trail, carry out regular maintenance, and protect the trail for the future.

You are invited to contribute at [www.wachusettgreenways.org](http://www.wachusettgreenways.org/) or by mail at Wachusett Greenways, P.O. Box 121, Holden 01520. A gift in *any* amount counts you as a member, and you will receive the *Wachusett Greenways* guide, which includes a map for the regions’ trails and greenways. Volunteers are welcome.

Wachusett Greenways Board of Directors:

Colleen Abrams, Chair Troy Milliken, Treasurer

Christy Barnes Mike Peckar, Secretary

Richard Barry Christopher Ryan

Stephen Chanis