**Wachusett Greenways 2021 Annual Report**

**27 Years of Sharing Community Connections**

Sharing smiles is a year round joy on the Mass Central Rail Trail. Here visitors can find solitude and community, rest and strength, harmony and victory, healing and compassion in the outdoors. Wachusett Greenways’ mission is to connect the community through regional trail building. Partnerships among every one of our dedicated volunteers, members and donors, town and state government, local foundations and businesses are key.

**Amazing Volunteers!**

Open the door and come join us. Renew your strength, help advance our mission, and inspire others by volunteering for trail clearing, photography, surveying, trail planning or outreach. Or share your own special skill. Here’s the message from one new 2021 volunteer: “Just wanted to say how thankful I am to have joined your ‘crew’!  It’s so cool being a part of all of you and giving some love and work back to the trails that have been a huge part of my family’s’ lives.” Another 2021 arrival expressed delight after helping with clearing ditches: “I had a great time mucking with all of you! And I'm sure I've told anyone who will listen how happy and grateful I am to have found this group and to be doing this work.”

In 2021, with small teams, we concentrated on upgrading trail stewardship by mowing, removing dead tree and ditch clearing. One volunteer replaced a bulletin board and built two beautiful new picnic tables. We tackled the Springdale Mill Historic Site to clear brush and clean signs. Community and school groups began returning during the time when Covid cases decreased.

**Partner Town Support**

All eight Towns--Barre, Holden, Oakham, Paxton, Princeton, Rutland, Sterling and West Boylston--contributed toward Wachusett Greenways’ annual operating expenses. Towns also helped with some mowing and special maintenance projects.

**Charnock Mural**

The long-imagined Charnock Tunnel Mural came to life in 2021. Artist Margaret McCandless engaged several other volunteers to join her in painting a mural of four seasons including local plants, and wildlife. Now trail visitors are delighted to find this beautiful surprise when they visit the rail trail in Rutland. Margaret described her vision for the mural, “By painting local scenery on the tunnel walls, the mural will help passers-by notice and appreciate aspects of the natural world outside the tunnel.” Wachusett Greenways is grateful to Margaret for initiating this project and for sharing her gifts as an artist, educator and mural painter.

In 2022 the project will continue with painting on the second wall of the Charnock Tunnel and engagement of more community volunteers. Massachusetts Cultural Council Grants from the towns of Rutland, Paxton and Holden all supported the mural project. Thank you, also, to Clayton Johansen and Nal’s Paint for contributing to priming the wall and paint supplies.

**Mass Central Rail Trail Reaching Across the Commonwealth**

Wachusett Greenways and partners are working to fill the gaps in our thirty mile section of the MCRT. Across the Commonwealth others are building more of the 104 mile MCRT between Northampton and Boston. In 2021, Wachusett Greenways, in partnership with the DCR Watershed Division, advanced construction of two new miles of trail in Holden between Mill and Princeton Streets to be completed in 2022. WG construction is in progress on the MCRT in West Boylston on the new Pleasant Street section; upgrading the Thomas Street section; and in Sterling replacing the bridge at West Lake Washacum. The DCR Recreational Trails Program and the MassTrails Program provide fundamental support with matching grants.

**WG Annual Meeting**

The annual meeting ordinarily scheduled for May was held on December 2, 2021 to review the prior year 2020. The next annual meeting in June 2022 will review and celebrate the year 2021. All are welcome!

**Let’s do it!**

Sadly, we said farewell to Eric Johansen, longtime WG and community supporter, par excellence. In 1994, Eric posed for *The Landmark* kick-off photo with a new trail development group sporting bicycles, snow shoes, cross-country skis, hiking and running shoes and strollers. Eric continued to encourage Wachusett Greenways, originally spun from Wachusett Earthday, to make the Mass Central Rail Trail and open spaces accessible to all. Continuing in the family tradition, Clayton and Bennett, sons of Eric and Lois Johansen, are also engaged with WG. In 2021 Clayton and this team from EJ’s Painting primed the Charnock Tunnel wall in Rutland for the new mural, and Bennett snowplowed the rail trail parking lot at River Street in Holden.

**THANK YOU to Every Supporter!**

Thank you to each and every donor who contributed to Wachusett Greenways in 2021. New donors and loyal members are key. The total number of donors for the year reached 864 including 40 new members. Donors came from 122 different towns in17 different states.

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. In addition to membership, Wachusett Greenways has three special Mass Central Rail Trail Funds: MCRT Construction Fund, Dr. Edward P. Yaglou MCRT Maintenance Fund, and the MCRT Stewardship Endowment Fund. Donors are invited to designate gifts to any of these Funds to help complete the trail, carry out regular maintenance, and protect the trail for the future. In 2021 donors expressed gratitude to be among the first to give to the Fund honoring Ed Yaglou, our long-time dedicated volunteer.

We invite you to sign up to volunteer and to contribute at [www.wachusettgreenways.org](http://www.wachusettgreenways.org/) or phone 508-479-2123 or by mail at Wachusett Greenways, P.O. Box 121, Holden 01520.

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