

# Williamstown Rural Lands Foundation



preserve  
promote  
educate

DECEMBER 2019

Protecting the Rural New England Character of Williamstown Since 1986

## A YEAR IN THE MAKING

Would you believe me if I told you this?

You can drive 10 minutes to the edge of town and park your car: Seven hiking trails to choose from. If you're up for it, scale one of the valley's highest peaks. Backcountry ski on what-was-once an NCAA ski racing venue, or snowshoe along the gentle grade of an historic woods road. In the drowsy heat of summer, camp overnight in the cool shade of a hemlock grove. Stroll an easy 10 minutes to an overlook: below you, a horse-tail waterfall cascades 20 feet down smooth-worn rock.

This was the vision presented one year ago, when a group of Williams students turned in their final report on the recreation potential of Berlin Mountain.

We have a stake in this vision: The WRLF conserved 36 acres on Berlin Mountain in 1997, in part to maintain access to the area's hiking trails.



WRLF's summer interns (L-R: Brianna Bourne, Gabo Lewis, and Jude Rorke) worked with Trails Coordinator Dan Gura on projects including the Berlin Mountain Recreation Area.



Hikers learn about the rehabilitation of the Berlin Mountain Recreation Area during one of WRLF's guided summer hikes.

We agreed to sponsor the students' research project, which was conducted as part of the College's Environmental Planning seminar. The research showed that much of the infrastructure for this recreation area was already in place. The only catch? It was all a bit - well, backwoods - in the worst sense of the word.

The parking lot was a mudpit, torn up by four-wheelers. In the winter, it was impassable. The trails weren't well-marked or signed, and it was easy to get lost without a map. Many stretches of trail had been neglected: they looked more like muddy troughs than footpaths.

Understanding the potential, as well as the growing demand in Williamstown for outdoor recreation opportunities, the WRLF spearheaded the rehabilitation of what is now the Berlin Mountain Recreation Area (BMRA).

Using the students' conclusions as a guide, we met and partnered with landowners to cooperatively manage the area for outdoor recreation. The partnership included the Town of Williamstown, Williams College, Berkshires Natural Resources Council (BNRC), and WRLF. In short order, the Williamstown DPW regraded the parking lot for year-round use.

After a spring of planning, the Williamstown Trail Crew got to work. Our goal: to make Berlin Mountain an 'all-comers' hiking area.

We rerouted badly degraded sections of trail. In two areas of failing slopes,

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we installed a rock staircase and buried cribworks to shore up the way. We hiked in twenty-five footbridges. Every trailhead and junction now has directional signs, color-coded to match distinct blazes on each trail. There are kiosks with maps and safety information in each parking lot. It should be difficult to get lost. It should be a joy to recreate.

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ALL OF THIS WORK BENEFITS OUR COMMUNITY. WE HAVE LOWERED THE BARRIER TO OUTDOOR RECREATION, ENCOURAGING HEALTHY ACTIVITY AND APPRECIATION OF THE OUTDOORS.

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The improved trail infrastructure makes hiking safer, and leads to positive hiking experiences while reducing negative environmental impacts.

This was a big lift. We relied on volunteers, neighbors, two trail crew interns, as well as employees from the Williamstown DPW and Williams College to make this recreation area a reality. There is still work to be done, but the BMRA is ready to go: Lace up



New informational kiosks greet skiers and snowshoers after the early-season December snowfall.

your boots, pull on your mittens. Get outside and check it out!

- Dan Gura

#### FIGHTING CLIMATE CHANGE

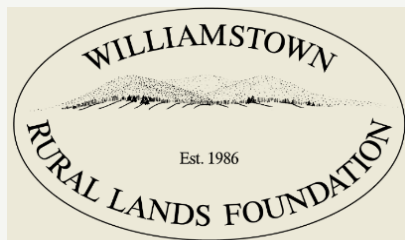
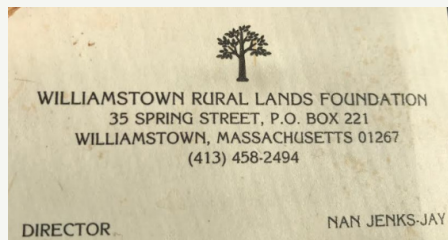
WRLF owns land with trees that absorb carbon, and we installed solar panels at Sheep Hill, but more must be done to combat the climate crisis. In 2019, WRLF teamed up with the Town of Williamstown to adopt an online platform to help local residents and businesses calculate their carbon footprints

and take measurable steps to reduce emissions. The website, still under construction, will suggest ways that we can green our homes, commutes, and lifestyles. The website will also identify rebates, incentives, and credits to help pay for improvements to your home. We are encouraging groups like the Williamstown COOL Committee and the Youth Environmental Squad (YES) at the Mount Greylock Regional School to join the effort. Contact Rural Lands to learn more about how you can get involved.

- David McGowan

#### BRAND REFRESH

In 2019, WRLF initiated a brand refresh. We hired the marketing company Trampoline of Glens Falls, NY, to help with the project. Trampoline hosted a series of focus groups over the summer, and many WRLF members and friends participated in the sessions. We are grateful for your input. Next, the Rural Lands name, logo, and tagline will be evaluated and possibly updated. Watch for a new look in 2020!



WRLF logos through the ages. From left-to-right: Tree logo on a business card from 1986; subsequent Berkshire hills logo, used until 2003. And, our most recent iteration. Keep an eye out for our fresh look in the new year.