



Northampton Rail-trail News

Friends of Northampton Trails and Greenways, Inc. (<http://www.fntg.net>) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that supports the expanding network of rail-trails in Northampton, Massachusetts. Volume 7, Fall 2012

A picture is worth a thousand words

A picture is worth a thousand words, so the saying goes. That was the inspiration that led The Friends of Northampton Trails and Greenways to organize a photo and video contest this year. We thought that artists could best capture the images and stories of the trail that would in turn inspire more people to explore them. The year-long Photo and Video Contest will conclude when the winners are announced on **October 12, from 5:30-8:00pm at the Trailside Gallery (14 Strong Avenue in Northampton)** as part of *Arts Night Out*. The festive night will include a viewing of the winning videos. **We hope that you'll come and partake in the festivities.**

I was struck by the variety and quality of the submissions. This contest is a wonderful way to bridge our vibrant arts community with the beautiful and growing trail network. Part of our mission as an organization is to encourage greater use of the trails. I think these photographers and videographers did a fantastic job.

There are many reasons why photographers are drawn to the expanding set of interconnected rail-trails in the valley. These include the great variety of scenic views, ideal spots for close-up wildlife viewing, some quintessential New England vantage points, beautiful native flowers and plants, historic bridges, and ever changing colors and light throughout the year.

But the stunning beauty of the trails might be a distraction for some. Anne Ely, from Hadley, observes that she starts out on the trail for exercise, but often ends up taking pictures. "There is a great variety of wildlife

Figure : Poster from the contest

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along that stretch and nature photography is the main reason I go there. I tell myself it is for the exercise also, although when it takes me 3 hours to travel 2 miles because of all the stops for pictures and to observe nature, I don't know if I can really count it as exercise."

Finding the perfect picture along the trail has been an interest of Donald David of Amherst for the past 25 years—even before the trail was paved. Back then it was an overgrown railroad bed, and he had to move the tree branches out of the way to get through. "In the years I have been using it, I have experienced almost every weather condition, bird, and animal that can be imagined." He continued. "One just has to be alert, patient, and ready to grab that shot."

Donald also notes that the environment around the trails has changed a lot over the years. "Previously it was almost all 'swampy' with practically no ponds. Gradually the swampy parts grew into ponds, with the help of the beavers." Once the ponds were established, other wildlife followed. All this makes for interesting opportunities for discovery on the trail.

The beauty of the trails is a draw for locals and visitors, notes Alan Hurwitz, also of Amherst. "We have the good fortune to have a part of the Rail Trail very near our home: one of the great benefits of our location. Of course my wife and I have used it for biking a lot over the years, ourselves, and especially when we have friends visiting, from less fortunate locales." Using the

trails, Hurwitz notes, is an "incentive for good health (physical and spiritual), and fun."

According to Alan this might be the best time of year to explore the trails due to the fall color and beautiful light. "I've seen and photographed on the Trail some of the most beautiful images I've seen anywhere around," he says. "The scenes, plants, and frequent wildlife, animal and human, always make for a fun experience and raise my spirits." The trail network is a wonderful resource that Hurwitz doesn't take for granted.

The Friends of Northampton Trails and Greenways wishes to thank the many people who submitted photos and videos, and who helped make it possible. Sponsors included Trailside Realty, Trailside Gallery, Valley Advocate, Alexis Design, Pivot Media, Eastmont Custom Framing, Friends of the Manhan Rail Trail, and the Pioneer Valley Chapter of MassBike. We also thank our judges: Craig Della Penna, Judith Eiseman, John Losito, Robert Floyd and Mary Jo Stanley. Brittany Claiborne's assistance with the judging was greatly appreciated, as well as Jessica Lapinski's support of the gallery showing. Finally, I couldn't have managed without the support of co-organizer Sean Kinlin.

The winning photographs will be on display at the Trailside Gallery for the month of October, and we encourage people to come and view them anytime the office is open.

Julia Riseman

Updates from the trails

While much of our efforts have been devoted to the Photo and Video contest (see the lead article), there's been a lot of other activity on the trails. This includes a new ad-hoc group looking at maintenance issues and connections with groups leading edible plant tours plus new spurs, construction and signage.

The long-awaited track improvements and the return of Amtrak to Northampton on higher speed rails, as well as the tunnel to connect the Norwottuck Trail and Manhan Rail Trails are still on schedule for late 2013. The even longer-awaited reconstruction of the Norwottuck Rail Trail from Hadley to Amherst is also nearing construction, with the 25% design meeting completed in September. While there will be some disruptions during the project, once completed the trail will be much easier (with considerably less glass!).

Other new trail connections have come on-line in recent months. Smith College donated a right-of-way for the multi-use trail from West Street up to the top of Hospital Hill, adjacent to the sledding hill. In the same gen-

eral area, Mass Development provided a right-of-way from the trail from the top of Hospital Hill to Olander Drive.

The City of Northampton is in the process of soliciting business sponsorships for trail cleanup, and FNTG is working with the City on the kiosk project and creation of a master plan for rail trail access.

Finally, we are working jointly with the Friends of the Manhan Rail Trail to update and reprint our map and brochure, and are seeking suggestions of sponsors who want to let thousands of trail users know of their support of this exciting network of paths.

There'll be info on these projects and more info on how you can help at the awards ceremony and opening for the **Photo and Video contest on October 12th from 5:30-8:00pm at Trailside Gallery at 14 Strong Avenue in Northampton. We hope that you can come.**

See you at the opening!

Nicholas Horton, President

The morning commute

“The morning commute” often conceived as a dreadful, traffic-laden slog into the workplace, takes on a whole new meaning when that commute is by bike on one of the most beautiful stretches of bike path in the Pioneer Valley.



Figure : The snowy crossing of the Connecticut River (photo credit: Kristin Mattocks)

Each morning, I’m on my bike by 6:45 am, leaving from Hadley and heading west to my office at the Department of Veterans Affairs, just across the street from

Look Park in Leeds. My morning commute is about 9 miles long, and with the exception of crossing Route 9 to get to my office, is exclusively on the Norwottuck Rail Trail.

What I love most about the early morning commute is the spectacular scenery along the trail that is made all the more beautiful by the morning light that changes with each season. Often, in the early morning hours of the summer and fall, fog hangs low in the valley, and as the sun rises the fog blends with the early morning sun to create a pastel glow that stretches across acres of Hadley farmland to the foothills of the Holyoke Range.

At other times, fog shrouds the entrance to the massive iron bridge that spans the Connecticut River, creating a gateway to Northampton that reminds me of the Phantom Tollbooth. On cold, dark winter mornings when I’m dressed in wool layers and my eyes peek out from my balaclava, my headlamp lights the way down the snowy bike path to see the tracks that other cyclists have already laid down in the snow.

Perhaps best of all, I see my fellow “regulars” along the trail each morning, usually at the same time and in the same place: the two women runners near the bridge who provide a kind smile and hello, the older couple walking hand in hand, the junior high school girl waiting for the bus, and the fast guy that rides in shorts regardless of how cold it is outside.

I often wonder why more people don’t use our bike paths to get to work each day, as the daily rewards of doing so (amazing scenery, increased fitness, reduced fuel costs) are so much greater than the costs (helmet head is the only thing that comes to mind). Go ahead: give it a try! I guarantee it will be worth the occasional awkward hair day.

Kristin Mattocks

One of Kristin Mattocks’s submissions to the Photo and Video Contest received an honorable mention. Her images came from her hours spent on the trails.

New trails and greenspace in Easthampton

The Pascommuck Conservation Trust (PCT) is working hard to provide trail access and greenspace in every neighborhood in Easthampton. This spring they added 30 more acres of land, bringing the total land PCT has protected to 465 acres in 16 neighborhoods.

The new land was added to the Pomeroy Meadows Conservation Area and Brickyard Brook, one of the most used spaces. The Pomeroy Meadows area protects the

Manhan River and the four major habitats surrounding it from erosion and human interference.

This addition has allowed for public access from Paul Street and Ranch Avenue to the 37-acre hiking and bird watching area along the scenic Manhan River. The Brickyard Brook area was increased by almost 40%, and now includes a large meadow, woodlands and streams, which flow into Brickyard Brook.

Other protected areas include Broad Brook Meadow, the Edward J. Dwyer Conservation Area, Hannum Brook Conservation Area, Old Pascommuck Conservation Area (which is contiguous to the Manhan Rail Trail) and the Old Trolley Line Conservation Area (which connects to the Massachusetts Audubon Sanctuary).

All of this and more is part of PCT's *Save Open Space in our Neighborhoods* campaign, launched this summer to protect and give access to the many beautiful trails, forests and waterways of the Easthampton area. With support from the City's Community Preservation Act Fund and its own capital reserves, the Trust has been able to act quickly in responding to these latest open space opportunities. Costs for land acquisition at the Brickyard Brook Conservation Area and the Pomeroy Meadows Conservation Area, combined with trail building at the latter, total \$203,000. They are looking for support to help raise the last 28% in funds needed to ensure the protection of these areas. More information can be found at pctland.org.

Brittany Claiborne



Figure : The Save Open Space in our Neighborhoods campaign is a major fundraiser to help support more land preservation.



Figure : The Old Trolley Line Conservation Area is one of many sites that the Pascommuck Conservation Trust has helped to preserve in Easthampton (Map credit: PCT).

Winner of Trail Neighbor Award

Congratulations to Jane Sommer, winner of the 2012 FNTG Trail Neighbor Award. The award was presented as part of the May Bike Week festivities at the Northampton Bike Breakfast. This is given annually to an individual, family, or organization that works on behalf of the Northampton rail trail network.

There are lots of ways that many people and institutions support this burgeoning network, and this award lets us publically recognize those who have played a part.

Jane received the 2012 Trail Neighbor Award this year in appreciation for her daily efforts to keep Veterans Field looking good. The area around the skateboard

park and the rail trail under South Street are heavily used and enjoyed by lots of people. Her regular and dedicated care of this area makes a big impact—without her work, the litter of sports drinks and snack bags would spill over and negatively affect our experience of the park and the trails. During the spring city-wide cleanup, this meant that almost no work was needed in this area.

Past recipients include the residents of Six-Eight High Street in Florence, Craig and Kathy Della Penna, the City of Northampton Department of Public Works, and Smith College. Nominations for the 2013 award will be solicited in the spring, and awarded at the Northampton Bike Breakfast.

Connecticut River Greenway project



Figure : Draft plans for the Connecticut River Greenway access from Damon Road (source: Northampton OPD)

Plans continue to move forward on the long awaited development of the Connecticut River Greenway in Northampton. This project would create access to open space along the Connecticut River as well as promote active recreation in the water as well as on a future bike path to Hatfield. While still early in the planning process, this is an exciting way to make a beautiful spot accessible.

This project is part of a plan that would eventually include a boathouse, access way to the water, access to

the New Haven and Northampton Canal, a boat launch for human powered craft, and docks. One third of the site on the west side would be retained by Lane Construction for a business park with three buildings.

The plans also call for a multi-use trail to be built from the state Conservation and Recreation Parks headquarters on Damon Road through the existing unit of the Connecticut River that the city already owns, and then through the site to the northerly end of the property. It is hope that in the future, this trail can be connected from the existing Norwottuck Rail Trail by a bicycle lane or cycle track and then up to Elm Court by a multi-use trail. Eventually this could continue up to Hatfield. The path is particularly attractive since once in Hatfield, there are a number of town roads that are ideal for biking.

This is a long term project with many components. The first step is the riverfront park, which would begin next year (site development but no boathouse) if proposals for Community Preservation Act (CPA) funding is approved. The next step of extending the trail will be a future project, with design and feasibility studies beginning after the riverfront park section is developed.

The Friends of Northampton Trails and Greenways has supported this project in letters to the CPA Committee, and encourages our members to learn more about this effort.

Nicholas Horton, President

Northampton Walk-Friendly Community

Earlier this month, the Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center (PBIC) named Northampton a *Walk Friendly Community* at the Bronze level. Northampton has 22.6 miles of trails, with another 12 miles planned or proposed. The trail system does an excellent job of linking with destinations such as schools, shopping, and other amenities.

PBIC launched the Walk Friendly Communities program in 2010 to increase awareness of the need for pedestrian and bicycle safety and accessibility. Northampton, already the recipient of the Bicycle Friendly Community designation, was recognized for its commitment to safe travel for pedestrians and ease of use, as well as the local government's commitment to continuous improvement.

When selecting cities, a large part of the criteria cen-

ters around documented plans and effort toward supporting the pedestrian community. Wayne Feiden, Director of Planning and Development for the City of Northampton, believes "that this honor demonstrates that we are ahead of 95% of the communities in the country and that we have a sustainable transportation paradigm in place." The Sustainable Northampton Comprehensive Plan ratified in 2008 outlined that 70% of households have or will have bike or pedestrian trail access within a half-mile. The city is continuing to improve 'walkability' in ongoing development and street projects that add to the existing sidewalk and rail trail access.

This *Complete Streets* policy helps to ensure that development is undertaken in a way that encourages walking as a mode of transport. Northampton's excellent zoning policies regarding dwelling units, density

bonuses, and mixed use were noted as being creative ways to encourage walking.

PBIC also recognized Northampton's commitment to enforcing pedestrian and bicycle safety laws. Police foot and bike patrols are focused in downtown and pay close attention to pedestrian safety on every shift. There is also usually one car per shift that is focused specifically on traffic safety enforcement.



Figure : The Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center has named nine new Walk Friendly Communities (including Northampton) for their work to improve safety, mobility, access and comfort for walkers.

While there's much good news in this designation, the PBIC report also indicated areas where further improvements are needed (else the designation would be silver, gold or platinum). These included a need for a comprehensive pedestrian counting program in locations around the City, construction of more sidewalks, signing the International Charter for Walking, decreasing the injury rate, and more use of leading pedestrian interval in areas where right-turning conflicts are common.

Much of this will require time, attention and resources from the City and its committees, primarily the Ped/Bike Subcommittee of the Transportation Committee. But much of these efforts are already underway. The Northampton City Council signed off on more than \$300,000 in projects to help address some of these needs, including the railroad underpass on the Norwottuck Rail Trail, improvements along South Street, new rail trail access from Grove Street, and a rail trail off-ramp at Edwards Square, which will help move the City closer towards Silver designation in future years.

Brittany Claiborne

Friends of Northampton Trails and Greenways, Inc.
PO Box 60643
Florence, MA 01062-0643

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