



# connections

*The newsletter of the Massachusetts  
Greenways and Trails Program*

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## **The Connecticut River Blueway:**

*A Regional Approach to Resource Protection and Recreation.*

- By Mike Gildesgame, Appalachian Mountain Club

Across the country, citizens and partnership are creating recreational opportunities on community waterways, and protecting or restoring river resources. A new National Blueways Initiative promises to offer assistance to these efforts, and the Connecticut River is one of the likely beneficiaries.

The America's Great Outdoors ([AGO](#)) Initiative, launched by the Obama Administration in April 2010, seeks to strengthen people's connection with the outdoors, support conservation partnerships, and protect the special places. As part of the AGO initiative, public listening sessions across the country to allowed the people to identify ecologically, recreationally, and economically important natural areas in each state. Common themes included:

- Enhancing recreational access to rivers,
- Constructing trails,
- Creating and enhancing urban parks
- Conserve significant landscapes.

A national "Blueways Initiative" arose out of this process, and in November 2011, the Department of Interior (DOI) issued its [50-state report](#), which included 101 projects related to conservation and outdoor recreation nationwide, of which about 20 were Blueways. The [Connecticut River Watershed Blueway](#) was one of the priority projects.

Acknowledging that many Massachusetts communities can benefit from additional access points to the Connecticut River, the report said, "Establishing a National Blueway will help to raise awareness for the river's recreational and natural resources and reconnect people to the water."

### **Building on a history of Connecticut River Action in Massachusetts**

In 1984 the Connecticut Valley Action Program was established by the Massachusetts Legislature. The program was charged with creating a comprehensive strategy for encouraging land and water use practices compatible with the values of the river; developing programs and policies to help conserve and enhance the resources of the river valley; and creating a supportive local constituency.

The Action Program, staffed by Terry Blunt of the Department of Environmental Management (now the Department of Conservation and Recreation), was pivotal in the creation of the

## **Building on the Connecticut River Greenway:**

### **At the Outset:**

The Connecticut Valley Action Program was formed in 1984.

### **Visionary:**

Terry Blunt, of DEM (now DCR) brought together diverse partners to explore issues, and articulate a vision.

### **Goal:**

To protect a diversity of habitats and features representing the CT River Corridor, provide a variety of recreational and educational experiences (both on the river and near it), assure protection of geological, archeological and cultural features and encourage appropriate use of the river and its environmental connections. The park includes areas to be acquired outright, lands protected by CR, and areas owned and managed by other partners.

### **Priorities:**

- Landscape and riparian land protection
- Regional trail and bikeway connections
- A water trail
- River access points and water trails
- Greenway Features
- Landscape features
- Discussions of conflict and other significant issues facing the river and its corridor.

### **Outcome:**

DCR's Connecticut River Greenway State Park

Connecticut River Greenway initiative and the Connecticut River Greenway State Park. Protection strategies and goals articulated in the 1996 Connecticut River Greenway Management Plan include protecting habitat, providing opportunities for recreation and education along the river corridor, and ensuring the integrity of the corridor's environmental, cultural, and natural resources. This vision is very much at the heart of today's Blueways Initiative.

While this Blueways Initiative continues to be defined and developed, several benefits are starting to emerge.

The Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC) and local partners recently hosted meetings in Vermont and Connecticut to bring together some 50 groups from the four watershed states that share similar programs and goals related to habitat protection or recreation, but which may not have worked together given the 410 miles covered by the river. While many of these groups share common goals and strategies, most of them are focused only on a portion of the river, providing environmental education, protecting water quality and wildlife habitat, or developing recreational access. A key goal of the Connecticut Blueway Initiative

is to build working relationships among groups up and down the watershed, to promote an exchange of information, share curricula, and jointly apply for grants for the benefit of the river and the communities through which it runs.

The Connecticut River also was one of five focal areas highlighted at the 2011 **New England Governors' Conference**. The conference [report](#), also released in November 2011, refers to the

AGO and the National Blueways Initiative; and the Governors' Commission on Land Conservation stated: "...today's compelling issues of resource conservation and development may best, if not *only* be addressed *regionally*, across the several states (and neighboring provinces)." The governors' report urged the region's Congressional delegations to support the five proposed initiatives, including the Connecticut River, to enhance river restoration, recreation, and resource protection in the region. The report also calls on the Obama Administration "to apply all related federal programs, staffing, and funding across departmental lines in new and creative ways to achieve their goals."

The Silvio O. Conte National Wildlife Refuge, has identified the Blueway Initiative as a priority for action and land protection, and seeks to bring greater emphasis, collaboration and resources to this effort.

These regional efforts give the Connecticut River organizations a strong start in building the Blueways concept and establish the Connecticut River as a national model for Blueways. For more information on how you can participate in the Connecticut River Blueway initiative, please contact Mike Gildesgame at the AMC at [mgildesgame@outdoors.org](mailto:mgildesgame@outdoors.org).

## **Tips and Tools (Mattock and McLeod)**

More information on the Americas Great Outdoors (AGO) initiative is at [www.americasgreatoutdoors.gov/](http://www.americasgreatoutdoors.gov/)

The US Department of Interior AGO 50-state report is available at <http://www.doi.gov/news/pressreleases/AMERICAS-GREAT-OUTDOORS-Salazar-Releases-50-State-Report-Highlighting-Projects-to-Promote-Conservation-Outdoor-Recreation.cfm>

The New England Governor's report is available at <http://efc.muskie.usm.maine.edu/docs/connect.people.2011.pdf>

More about the Connecticut River Greenway State Park at <http://www.mass.gov/dcr/parks/central/crgw.htm>

### **A Trail Can Be A Trial**

**by Christine Ward**

A trail can be a trial

To hikers

It can toil and sweat you

Up the mountain

It can pain your knees

When going down

It can lose itself from you

When blazes fade and undergrowth jungles

It can bring you into muddy quagmire

Where vicious mosquitoes prowl

A trail can be a trial  
To trail builders  
Build a trail and a tree is bound  
To fall upon it  
And water will rush down it  
And erosion will make a mockery of your intentions  
The rocks you need  
Will refuse to budge to a better location  
And poison ivy will linger  
To torture your future  
Sleeping with Itch

A trail can be a trial  
But without trying  
How can we succeed?  
The miles are for the making  
The mountains for the view  
Perhaps it is the trial  
That makes a trail worthwhile.

CW (September 2011)

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