

APPALACHIAN MOUNTAIN CLUB BAY CIRCUIT TRAIL VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS



2015

Season Report



The Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC) expands volunteer trail work opportunities during the program's second year to provide increased stewardship support and implement improvements on the Bay Circuit Trail, a 230+ multi-use mile route that links parks, open spaces and communities in 37 outer-Boston towns.

I. TRAIL VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS

Overview

AMC’s Bay Circuit Trail (BCT) Volunteer Program grew in 2015 to include a broader range of trail volunteer projects, building on the strong foundation established during the 2014 inaugural season. A variety of single and new multi-day programs improved trail access, reduced user impacts on the environment, and enhanced user safety and experience. In 2015, 193 AMC volunteers contributed 1,550.50 hours of work to the BCT.

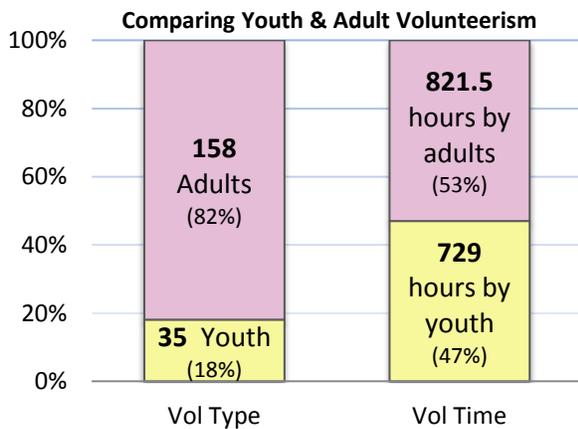
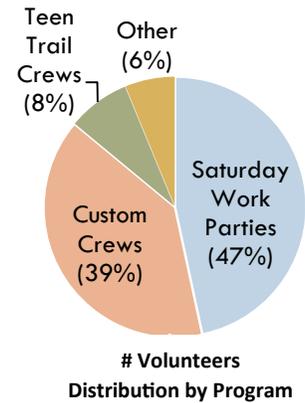
Every project relies on invaluable support from Bay Circuit Trail Committee (BCTC) regional representatives, local stewards, land managers, town conservation commission staff, and the host of event volunteers who worked hard to accomplish these improvements. Without fail, BCT partners and volunteers are dedicated, enthusiastic and industrious!

The year in AMC volunteer trail programs on the BCT¹, by the numbers:

	Total Volunteers ²	Total Volunteer Hours	Average Hours/Volunteer	Total Miles of Trail Improved	Target Trail Areas Improved (out of 31 total)
2015	193	1,550.50	8.03	9	6
2014	205	1,205	5.88	5.75	5

A closer look at 2015 volunteer contributions:

Program Type	# Work Days ³	# Volunteers	Avg. Hours/Vol	Total Hours
Saturday Work Parties	7	90	4.7	425
Custom Crews	6	76	6.6	505
Teen Crews	10	15	38.9	584
Other Programs ⁴	2	12	3.0	36.5
TOTAL	25	193	8.03	1550.5



Across all programs, youth (under age 18) accounted for **less than a fifth** of total volunteers, but they contributed **almost half** of the total hours worked due to this year’s increase in multi-day youth crews (two week-long teen crews and a three-day custom crew).

¹ Totals for all 2015 programs through the final Saturday Work Party of the year on November 7.

² “Volunteer” refers to all participants that were not AMC staff. Volunteer #s count total volunteer experiences, not individuals.

³ A “work day” counts all partial and full-day events, ranging from 3.5 to 8 hour sessions.

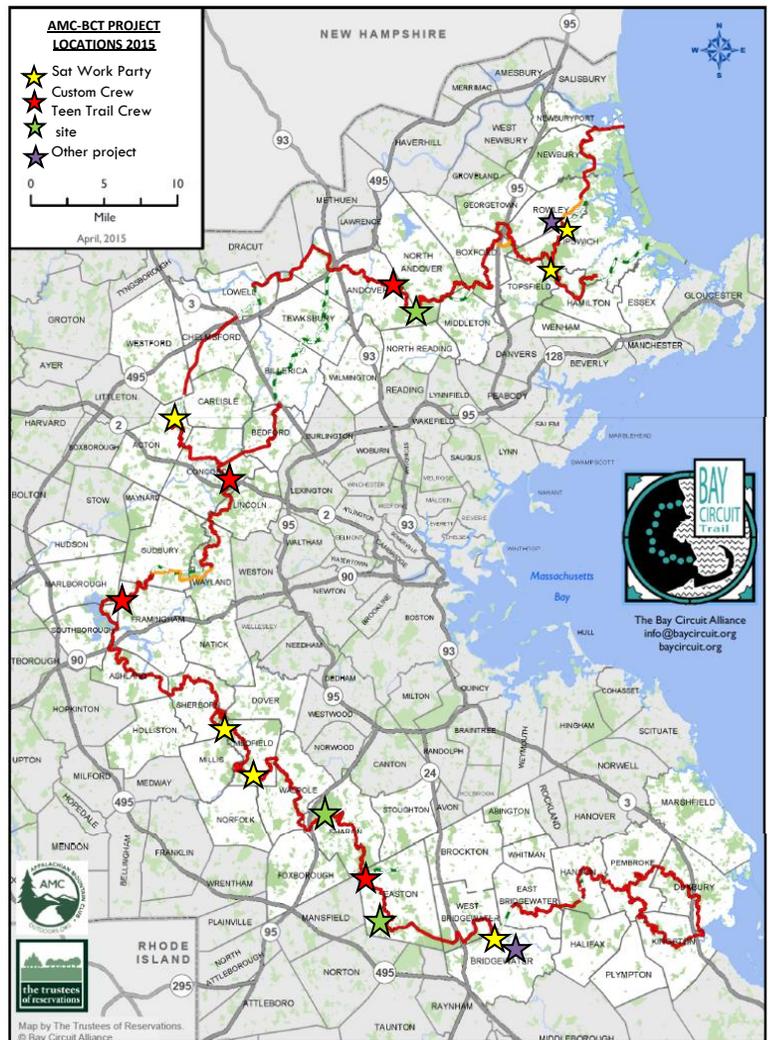
⁴ Programs were a basic maintenance skills workshop and a kiosk installation with select group of local volunteers.

2015 AMC Bay Circuit Trail Volunteer Programs

Project Planning: Collaboration with land managers and local trail volunteers is essential to secure proper approvals for trail projects and plan successful event logistics. The list of 31 priority “preliminary target areas” from AMC’s 2014 BCT Trail Inventory and Assessment⁵ continued to guide project coordination, along with trail needs identified by partner land managers, trail groups and the BCTC.

In total, 2015 programs impacted 15 different properties in 12 BCT towns. We had the pleasure of continuing partnerships with staff and volunteers at six of the properties where trail programs took place this year. The other nine projects sites were new in 2015, providing the opportunity to develop new relationships with the associated BCT partners.

"PRELIMINARY TARGET AREAS" ADDRESSED DURING 2015 PROGRAMS			
Location	Town	Problem	Work Completed (Event Date)
Emerson House easement (adjacent to Hapgood-Wright Town Forest)	Concord	Wet areas	100 feet traditional bog bridging (6/11)
MassAudubon Moose Hill Sanctuary	Sharon	Overgrown	Brushing out, basic maintenance (7/16)
DCR ⁶ Harold Parker State Forest	North Andover	Wet areas	100-foot boardwalk (7/20-7/24)
Town Cons. Area -Nashoba Brook (& Spring Hill)	Acton	Wet areas	Continued trail hardening started in 2014: added a step stone and bog bridge. (7/25)
DCR Borderland State Park	Easton	Very wet	23-foot boardwalk over intermittent drainage. Additional work to continue in 2016. (9/16)
Trustees Noon Hill Reservation	Medfield	Dysfunctional waterbars	Installed 2 new rock waterbars & 2 check steps. Additional work to continue in 2016. (9/26)



Staffing: Volunteer Programs Supervisor Beth Gula and MassLIFT-AmeriCorps member Molly Higgins (who completed a full-time, 11-month service term in August) were the primary AMC leaders for volunteer programs throughout the year. AMC North Country trails staff supported several larger-scale events during the year, and Molly co-led both teen trail crew weeks with New Hampshire-based AMC summer crew leaders. We again relied on the expert support and enjoyable company of volunteer leader Nate Eckman, who assisted with five work days.

2016 Outlook: The BCT Volunteer Program will add a 24-week seasonal Projects Coordinator and two 12-week summer Crew Leaders to facilitate an expanded summer of week-long teen trail crews and increased adult and youth custom programs.

⁵ Garland, 16-17: “Sections where a marshalling of resources would likely provide the greatest improvements to the user experience.”

⁶ Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) – AMC coordinated with regional supervisors and park staff.

Work Accomplished

Type of Work	Quantity/Length
Maintenance	
Blazing	2.75 miles
Brushing	7.5 miles
Check Step Repair	5
Tread Graveling	1000 feet
Weeding/Mulching	0.2 acre
Construction	
New Trail	0.25 miles
Bog Bridges (Dimensional Stringers)	11
Boardwalk (Dimensional)	3 structures totaling 159 feet
Step Stone	1
Water Bar (Wood)	2
Water Bar (Rock)	2
Check Step (Wood)	4
Trailhead Kiosk Installation	2
Signs Installed	9
Fencing Installed	40 feet
TOTAL Post Holes Dug	17
TOTAL Rocks Set	34



Notable new projects this year included signage and trailhead kiosk installations that served to better identify the Bay Circuit Trail route as well as improve wayfinding at confusing junctions or potentially hazardous road crossings. A portion of AmeriCorps Molly Higgin’s time focused on developing resources to promote increased, standardized use of signage and kiosks across the BCT. Over the winter and spring, we laid the groundwork for the pilot trail sign project on the that culminated on National Trails Day in Willowdale State Forest, Ipswich (photo above).



Constructing basic boardwalks through wet areas was the other significant new type of project work AMC tackled on the BCT. Built with pressure treated dimensional lumber, the boardwalks consisted of three-foot wide decking placed on stringers supported by base logs set in the ground (the Harold Parker State Forest boardwalk, depicted in the photo above, also had a central section set on 4x4 posts over a stream crossing). Due to the formal review process generally required for work in wetland areas under the MA Wetlands Protection Act, we started communication with the various stakeholders as early as possible in order to secure appropriate approvals, which often takes months.

New! Pilot Teen Trail Crews

Two week-long teen trail crews assessed how AMC's longstanding teen trail crew model could translate to the frontcountry setting of the BCT. Teens age 14-17 worked Monday to Friday (including camp setup/breakdown). We managed challenges like heat and humidity, ubiquitous poison ivy, the threat of deer tick bites, and complicated travel logistics for leaders and the crew in a suburban/urban region. The successes of each pilot week demonstrated how robust partnerships allow for productive and enjoyable introductory teen volunteer experiences.

Program	Date	Town	Land Manager/Partner(s)	Property Name	# Vols	Hours Total
Teen Trail Crews					15	584
Non-Residential - YMCA	7/13-7/17	Sharon, Easton	MassAudubon, Town of Easton /Friends of North Andover Trails	Moose Hill Wildlife Sanctuary, Old Pond Conservation Area	6	224
Base Camp Residential	7/20-7/24	North Andover, Andover	DCR, TTOR	Harold Parker SF/Ward Res	9	360



➤ *Old Colony YMCA crew hard at work on check steps and waterbars to address erosion on a popular BCT spur trail.*

A non-residential crew tested the success a day-work teen program. Connections between a BCT volunteer and the Old Colony YMCA in Brockton (a large urban center near the BCT) led us to partner with the YMCA to bring youth from their programs out to learn trail work. We planned the week with YMCA staff similarly to a custom crew. AMC staff shuttled the crew each day from their school in Brockton to work sites in neighboring BCT towns. Land manager MassAudubon generously shared excess vegetables grown on their farm to add local flavor to the crew's standard trail lunches, and an education staff member engaged the crew in a naturalist walk one afternoon.

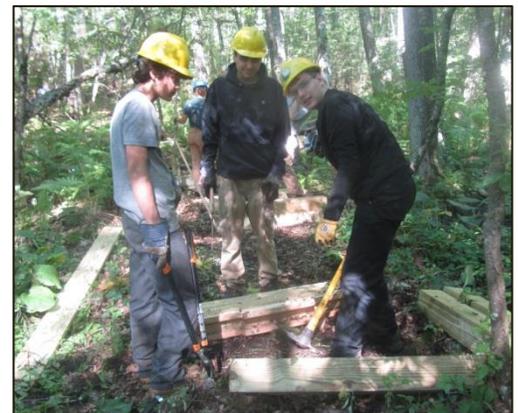
2016 Outlook: We will run two non-residential weeks with community youth agencies or school partners near the BCT.

An overnight crew camped at Harold Parker State Forest, working during the week on boardwalk construction project within the forest and basic maintenance on a nearby Trustees reservation. The DCR staff was friendly, encouraging, and flexible in their support of the trail work and camp life logistics. Local trail volunteers went above-and-beyond in project planning and obtaining regulatory approvals in time for the teen week.

2016 Outlook: We will run three consecutive week-long crews based at Harold Parker State Forest. Local volunteers are currently assessing projects for the teens in the surrounding towns.



◀ *Left, crew hangs out at camp where they enjoy campfires, swimming and wash off the day's dirt in a bathhouse.*



➤ *Right, a team effort to set base logs for the wetland boardwalk.*

Saturday Work Parties

Free, open-registration Saturday work parties continued monthly throughout the year. These events do not require prior trails experience, making them ideal introductory trail work opportunities. As in 2014, each event attracted a mix of volunteers from near and far; some participants lived just down the street from a project, while others travelled from towns across Eastern Massachusetts or neighboring states. Volunteers represented a range of ages and trail work experience.



➤ *Chopping out stumps while cutting a new section of trail that eliminated a sidewalk stretch in Medfield.*

Program	Date	Town	Land Manager/ Partner(s)	Property Name	# Vols	Hours
Saturday Work Parties					90	425
April	4/18	Bridgewater	Bridgewater Conservation/ Nunckattessett Greenway	Iron Works Park	19	95
May	5/2	Hamilton	DCR/Essex County Trails Association	Bradley Palmer State Park	18	70.5
June 1 of 2	6/6	Ipswich	DCR/Ipswich Bay Circuit Committee	Willowdale State Forest	16	63
June 2 of 2	6/7	Ipswich	DCR/Ipswich Bay Circuit Committee	Willowdale State Forest	11	55
July	7/25	Acton	Acton Conservation	Spring Hill	5	21.5
Sept	9/26	Medfield	Trustees, Town of Medfield/REI	Noon Hill	10	62
Nov	11/7	Medfield	Town of Medfield/Norfolk Hunt Club	Council on Aging - Medfield	11	58

This year, we ran seven of the nine advertised work parties. Two planned dates in the fall were cancelled in part due to limited capacity when the AmeriCorps term ended. The experimental full weekend program tested for National Trails Day was an attempt to encourage repeat volunteers on back-to-back days and allow for more complex or time-intensive projects. Many registrants requested to take part in just one Saturday or Sunday, not both, making the weekend most successful at simply getting more people engaged overall. In future years, testing a full weekend project where second day participants are required to have volunteered on the first day would be worthwhile if planned on a less popular weekend and only if designated camping or overnight accommodations were available very close to the work site.

Margo Sulmont first volunteered on the BCT for a 2014 work party. What keeps her coming back month to month & year to year?

“Learning new skills...

...meeting new people and finding familiar faces...

...discovering new parks, trails, and conservation lands in Massachusetts and realizing how lucky we are to have so many beautiful places right next to Boston.”



➤ *New rock waterbar construction on National Public Lands Day in Medfield. The Trustees of Reservations (The Trustees) staff drove boulders to the top of the hill via an old woods road, providing a wealth of convenient building material!*

Custom Crews

Custom trail programs took place with returning and first-time youth and corporate employee groups. Engagement with employee groups increased, while programs with youth groups decreased compared to last year. Total custom crew volunteers and hours declined slightly from 2014 in part due to the new teen pilot crews filling more of the summer schedule. We also had some conflict in finding project dates, locations and type of work that suited the needs of several groups who inquired about programs.

Spotlight on returning groups...

Groundwork Lawrence Green Team: Groundwork Lawrence, a member of AMC’s Youth Opportunities Program (YOP), volunteered again this summer at The Trustees’ Ward Reservation in Andover. We coordinated with Groundwork staff to schedule one Green Team for three consecutive days (compared to single volunteer days with three different groups last year) to complete a more in-depth boardwalk construction project (photo at right).



Blue Cross Blue Shield MA (BCBSMA): BCBSMA again selected AMC as a host for their company-wide Service Day, committing funds and a large employee group to benefit the BCT. Planning work for this year’s event focused solely on the town of Easton to keep volunteer groups close together during the day. Forty-five volunteers split off into teams to work on projects in Borderland State Park and the nearby Old Pond town conservation land several miles away, accomplishing an incredible amount of work in a short work day.



“It was great to be outside! I enjoyed seeing what a difference we could make and how grateful others using the trails were for the work we were doing!”

“[I liked] the teamwork and the appreciation, as well as getting to know other Blue Cross employees for the first time and getting to know some that I already knew better.”

“I will definitely be back with my family and pup.”

- BCBSMA 2015 volunteer feedback

Program	Date	Town	Land Manager	Property	# Vols	Hours Total
Custom Crews					76	505
Marsh & McLennan Agency	5/8	Framingham	DCR	Callahan State park	10	35
Athena Capital	6/11	Concord	Emerson House/ Town trail easement	Emerson-Thoreau Amble	10	50
YOP - Groundwork Lawrence	7/29- 7/31	Andover	TTOR	Ward Reservation	11	150
BCBSMA	9/16	Easton	DCR	Borderland	45	270

2016 Outlook: Custom programs with corporate groups will be woven into AMC’s Corporate Member Program. Trail volunteer events will be offered as an opportunity for a certain level of membership; the BCT Volunteer Program will collaborate with the AMC Development staff in establishing the schedule and details of each program. Custom programs with community and non-profit groups will continue as usual, with a standard associated fee (and limited financial assistance available for groups in need).

II. ONGOING PROJECTS

AMC staff worked with the BCTC on initiatives to support marking and standardization, as well as address longstanding trail issues.

- **New trail markers** displaying the BCT logo, website URL, and arrows to mark turns were finalized in the spring. These promote the BCT's identity and make wayfinding easier, especially for novice trail users who may not understand the convention of generic blazes. Over 4,000 new aluminum trail markers have been distributed to trail stewards. In some towns, volunteers are remarking entire stretches of the trail with the new markers, while in many other places, the new markers will replace old white blazes on as needed.



- An updated **BCT Stewardship Guide**, revised from the 2004 **BCT Maintenance Manual**, is under review by the BCTC and local volunteers. The revision includes condensed and reformatted information with more images to make the resource readable and useful for new and veteran stewards alike. We anticipate the final version to be posted online in early 2016.
- The BCTC is still discussing the structure of an **"Adopt-a-Trail"** program to ensure that every section of the BCT receives sufficient, standardized monitoring and maintenance. We are considering the challenges of successfully integrating a new program into the already existing stewardship networks responsible for the maintenance across much of the BCT. As noted in the 2014 Season Report: "Regions across the trail fall along a spectrum of local volunteer capacity, from towns with strong independent stewardship networks, to areas that may lack an adequate volunteer cadre and/or desire AMC's support and direction in recruiting and training new volunteers."
- AMC facilitated a pilot volunteer **Basic Maintenance Workshop** for local trails stewards who are part of a regional trails initiative. The one-day session, hosted at Bridgewater State University, also incorporated strategies for retaining and training active volunteers, as well as provided an opportunity for discussion on how the different town groups deal with similar issues.



➤ *Local trail and conservation land stewards take part in a discussion during the afternoon practical portion of the training workshop.*

- **Mill River Trail Erosion and Flooding:** During the course of 2015, AMC led a large coalition of stakeholders to move improvements forward at a "severe" trail problem, as rated by the 2014 AMC Inventory and Assessment in DCR Georgetown-Rowley State Forest. Contracted local builders and volunteers began work in mid-November on a boardwalk over the beaver-flooded trail crossing, step construction up the adjacent eroded slope, and an improved parking area at the nearby trailhead. Full update will be included in the 2016 report.

III. ONLINE RESOURCES

Appalachian Mountain Club. *Where We Work—Bay Circuit Trail*: www.outdoors.org/baycircuittrail

Appalachian Mountain Club. *Volunteer Trail Opportunities*: www.outdoors.org/volunteer

Bay Circuit Trail and Greenway: www.baycircuit.org (Website newly redesigned in 2015)

Garland, Larry. (2014). *Bay Circuit Trail and Greenway Trail Inventory and Assessment Report*. Appalachian Mountain Club. <http://www.outdoors.org/pdf/upload/Bay-Circuit-Trail-Assessment-Final-Report-Apr-14-2014.pdf>

IV. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

AMC's Bay Circuit Trail Volunteer Program would like to thank the following 2015 funders for supporting us this year:

Arcadia Charitable Trust

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts

Clive W. Lacy Trust

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We would also like to thank the **MassLIFT-AmeriCorps** program, which is funded in part by a grant provided by the **Corporation for National and Community Service**, administered by the **Massachusetts Service Alliance**, and run in partnership with **Mount Grace Land Conservation Trust**. This program supported **Molly Higgins**, who served as the AMC's BCT Community Engagement Coordinator member from September 2014 to August 2015 and to whom we are indebted for all of her hard work, dedication, patience, and good humor!



Community Engagement Coordinator Molly Higgins

We are also grateful for the contributions we received from individuals for the Bay Circuit Trail in 2015.

Thank you to all those who support and participate in AMC's volunteer programs and help make the Bay Circuit Trail an outstanding resource for outdoor engagement!
