

Bay Circuit Trail & Greenway

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A brief note from the coordinator.

A hectic and exciting April has led to a beautiful May and I am thrilled once again to be sending out this newsletter. My available time to put this edition together has been limited, so the result does not cover the BCT as broadly as I had planned, so next month we will take a more aerial view!

In this May edition, we look at the fantastic and inspiring work of some volunteers at the Northern Terminus of the BCT, Ron McAdow offers his insight on the wildlife conservation potential of the BCT, and I announce the brand new patch design!

I would also like to note that our new BCT Outreach Assistant, Sarah Dolan, is fully onboarded and is prepping numerous exciting events for this summer. Check out the BCT Instagram @baycircuit for event, recaps, highlights, and more!

Please send BCT updates, stories, photos, and news to astearns@outdoors.org or sdolan@outdoors.org to be included each month!

UPCOMING EVENTS – MAY and June

May 10th – Saturday Morning Maintenance in Pembroke (w/ Amber Stearns)

May 11th – Mother's Day Bike Ride on the Bruce Freeman (w/ Amber Stearns)

May 15th to 18th – AMC's Trail Skills College @ Camp Dodge in NH

May 17th – Oglivie Town Forest and Hathaway Hill in Weston (w/ Judith Watson and Pam Richardson)

May 22nd – Try Exploring Andover (TEA) Time hike – Ward Hill to Skug River (w/ Mark Kaluzny)

May 31st

- Hike For a Change Finish Line Party
- Boston Chapter End-to-End Hike of the BCT
- Mystic Link Trail – Connect with Open Spaces Panel

June 1st – West Bridgewater River Walk

June 7th – Saturday Morning Maintenance (w/ Amber Stearns)



NORTHERN TERMINUS UPDATE

Thanks to funding from the *Essex County Community Foundation*, *Essex National Heritage Area*, and *Institution for Savings* in partnership with NPS and Historic New England, the BCT Northern Terminus is new and improved! This work would not have been accomplished without the help of the volunteers who spent their weekend hauling gravel and lumber, digging post-holes, assembling a complicated 27-ft boardwalk and about 50 feet of bog bridging (and drinking Moxie).

Boardwalk

A new addition to AMC's Trails Team, Connor Piechota, spearheaded the design and construction of a brand-new boardwalk at the Northern Terminus of the BCT. Head up to the Parker River National Wildlife Refuge Visitors Center to start your next BCT hike on this fresh boardwalk! Sixteen hard-working and enthusiastic volunteers from Boston Chapter 20s&30s joined Connor, Amber, and Sarah on project work the first weekend in May to make this happen!

Trail Re-Tread

The trail leading up to our new boardwalk needed some attention. To make improvements, the volunteers excavated 64 ft² of old overgrown tread, and compacted and graded the remaining soil. They dug out ditches on either side of the trail to install 4x4s as new edges of the trail. Finally, once this new tread had been constructed and set, vols moved over 2 tons of gravel to this pathway and compacted it into a level surface that aligned with the edge of the new boardwalk.

Bog Bridging

The BCT's starting point includes an optional loop around the historic Spencer Peirce Little Farm. This loop skirts an active farm and crosses a swampy corridor leading to an airfield along the scenic Plum Island Turnpike. Amber Stearns and Sarah Dolan led some of the volunteers in replacing the sills of a wide section of bog bridging that was being absorbed by the swamp. Now, on your loop around the farm your feet will remain dry while you get a good look at the departing and landing airplanes!

Invasive Removal

Almost anywhere you hike, you will come across invasive species infestations. The same applies to the corridor of trail surrounding our bog bridges. Volunteers hacked, sawed, and clipped away at the honeysuckle and bittersweet invading this swampy segment.

Up Next

The final elements of this exciting project are still to come! Visit in a month or so and you'll spot new trailhead and directional signage, a bench or two, and some informational brochures about the land you're about to traverse and enjoy. We hope you enjoy your next visit.

See the next page for some project photos courtesy of Sarah Dolan.

SATURDAY MORNING MAINTENANCE

I am looking for volunteers down in southeastern MA to join me on Saturday Morning Maintenance of some unadopted sections of BCT in the Pembroke/Duxbury/Kingston region.

About two Saturdays a month from 9:30am – 12:30pm we will do some standard maintenance of the trail segments in the most need. Providing a facelift of corridor and drainage clearing, reblazing, and potential bog bridge installation. Please spread the word! Look for these event postings [HERE](#).



SINGLE-DAY BCT END TO END

**Celebrating AMC Boston
Chapter's 50th Anniversary
with a series of BCT section
hikes**

Did you know that AMC's Boston Chapter is turning 50 in 2025? As part of the year-long celebrations, AMC Boston is planning a day of hikes along the Bay Circuit Trail on May 31st, with the goal of attempting to hike nearly the whole trail in a single day. Trips will be posted for signups on AMC's Outdoors Connector on [outdoors.org](https://www.outdoors.org) using the search keyword HBBOS50 (check back for additional trips as they are posted). Come along and join us!!

BCT PATCHES



A new supply of Bay Circuit Trail patches is in! As of right now, these will only be available at in-person events. Supply is limited and a distribution plan is in development. Stay tuned and check out the fresh design!



Old boardwalk



New boardwalk!



Stronger bog bridges



Volunteers hard at work!



THE BAY CIRCUIT GREENWAY: A VITAL CRESCENT OF WILDLIFE HABITAT

By: Ron McAdow; former Executive Director of Sudbury Valley Trustees and former Board Chair of the Bay Circuit Alliance.

The Bay Circuit Greenway is more than a leafy wrapper for the Bay Circuit Trail. It also provides homes and highways for wildlife. While we are fortunate to have inherited the Greenway and the biodiversity it supports, there is work to be done. We should dedicate ourselves to leaving the Greenway in better shape than we find it.

The Bay Circuit vision emerged from regional landscape planning in the first half of the 20th century. The 1929 “Report of Governor’s Committee on Needs and Uses of Open Space” identified and mapped an arc of undeveloped land surrounding Boston’s urban core and dubbed it the Bay Circuit. In 1937, a report published by The Trustees of Public Reservations called for more conservation of land along the Bay Circuit. This foresighted document proposed that existing reservations be linked by additional land protection and by “connecting lanes” leading from one patch of natural land to another. The Bay Circuit was intended to improve the quality of life of people in eastern Massachusetts. (Fig 1. Top Right)

The natural areas that afford fun and relaxation for our species are necessary to the wild mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians that live in our region. Their survival depends on the size and quality of the available habitat and the connections between habitat patches. The purposes stated in the early Bay Circuit documents were human-centric, but the conservation intention shows through. A paragraph in the “Woods and Wildlife” section of the 1937 report begins, “Three distinct forest societies stand forth on the Bay Circuit panorama,” and goes on to describe natural communities included in the “Circuit belt.”

While the Bay Circuit has continued to be spoken of primarily with reference to its trail, the Bay Circuit Greenway plays a key role in wildlife conservation. Wildlife corridors enable animals to repopulate depleted habitat and to strengthen their species by spreading genetic diversity. Stretching as it does from the North to the South Shore, looping the urban hub, the Bay Circuit crosses ten river watersheds. Where the trail proceeds on pavement, the Greenway takes to wetlands. Top predators including fishers and bobcats have re-established themselves in eastern Massachusetts in recent years. Who knows to what degree the Greenway has facilitated the spread of these new arrivals to appropriate habitat areas? (Fig 2. Middle Right)

Young animals must disperse to rear their own progeny in new territories. Roadkill, which might have no effect on the populations of some creatures (think, gray squirrels), can devastate populations of reptiles and amphibians. The reproductive cycles of these slow-moving animals require seasonal movements that, all too often, expose them to automobile traffic.

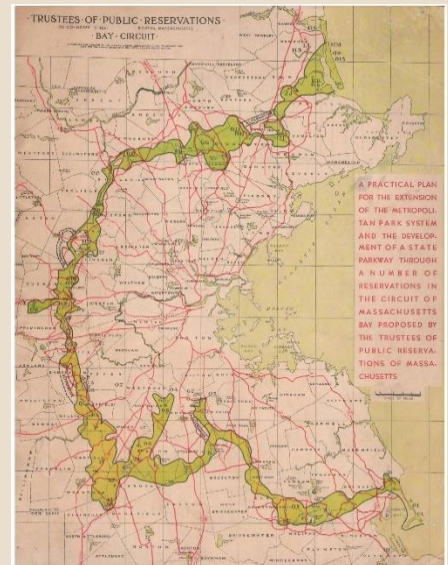


Figure 1. The cover of the Bay Circuit proposal published in 1937. Photo by Larry Anderson.



Figure 2. When the Bay Circuit was first envisioned, who would have guessed that bobcats, beavers, coyotes, and fishers would return to populate its greenspace? Photo by Richard Piccarreto.



Figure 3. Blanding's and other turtles move from wetlands to dry sites to lay their eggs. Photo by Brian Butler.

Box turtles, wood turtles, Blanding's turtles and spotted turtles are among our most vulnerable wildlife species. Frogs, likewise, are threatened and also perish on our roads. (Fig 3. Bottom Right)

Surface road crossings threaten the safety of wildlife in transit. Wildlife passages, accidental and intentional, do exist beneath roads and railroads in the Bay Circuit. In 2005, when high barriers were added to the median of Route 2 in Concord, underpasses for wildlife were constructed near the Sudbury River. A wide variety of animals immediately adopted these structures for their movements, as documented by Concord's Wildlife Passage Task Force. Another important Greenway passage came a decade later. From the Department of Transportation website:

In 2015, a 1,000-foot Wildlife Culvert Passage was constructed under Route 2 in Concord, as part of the Route-2 Crosby Corner Safety Improvement Project. The 6.5ft. by 6.5ft.- culvert has been monitored using a MassDOT wildlife camera. Visitors include deer, fisher, gray fox, racoon, eastern painted turtle, and a bobcat.

(Fig 4. Top Right; Fig 5. Middle Right)

There are precedents for construction of wildlife passages in our Greenway and their effectiveness is proven. Properly designed and located, they can be key tools for improving the health of our ecosystem and preserving fragile members of our natural communities.

The Greenway has many discontinuities. Gaps in protected land and habitat split by roads are both problems we can address. We should get right to work because the warming climate will stress populations, making wildlife corridors ever more important as channels for movement and adaptation. (Fig 6. Bottom Right)

What actions can we take? First, we should gather information, town by town. Where exactly could additional land protection be of most value in connecting habitat areas? That knowledge can guide targeted land protection. What road crossings are most destructive of wildlife? What kinds of animals are dying in these locations? With answers to those questions, we will know where to install mitigation for wildlife—and how passages should be designed to protect movements of those animals.

Volunteers can take the lead in educating their communities about the importance of improving the Greenway. Conservation commissions can support these goals through their permitting processes. Land trusts can assist in identifying and following up on land protection opportunities. Landowners, especially those located in narrow connecting lanes, can make their property friendly to the passage of wildlife.

Improvements of the Greenway will be made by local intelligence and energy. Those capacities built the trail, and they can take the Greenway to a new level of ecological importance. When you see the logo of the Bay Circuit Trail, look beyond your walk in the woods. Think also of the creatures, large and small, that rely on the Bay Circuit Greenway for survival. Let's get to work and leave the Greenway better than we found it.



Figure 4. Wildlife passage under Route 2 in Concord. Photo by Ron McAdow.



Figure 5. Long-tailed weasel crossing safely beneath Route 2. Trailcam photo by Dan Stimson.

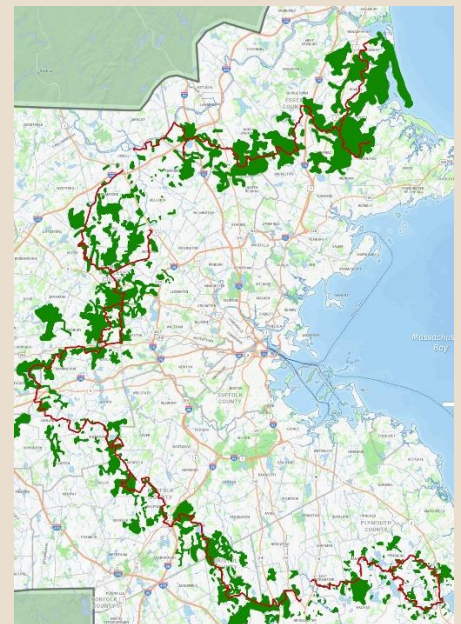


Figure 6. Bay Circuit Greenway and Trail. Source: MassMapper and Bay Circuit Trail Maps.