

WMass BACKCOUNTRY ALLIANCE NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2022-23



SUCCESSFUL FALL 'TRAIL DOG' DAYS

With two Fall 2022 trail work days completed at Beartown Backcountry in South Lee—and a couple of extra ones organized impromptu at our newest BC Zone (TBA) —over 40 volunteers logged more than 40 total labor hours this season! Getting out of bed early on the weekend in October or November to

drag brush, saw stumps and pull striped maple on steep hillsides is not glamorous work, but it IS necessary to keep the trails ski/rideable for this season and the next.

For this, we tip our helmets to you: Many thanks for helping to support the backcountry in WMass!

If you enjoy some quality tree turns or a sweet line in one of our managed zones this season, consider coming out next Fall to help so that we can continue making it even better...



please visit us at www.artbev.coop

CTA/SOVTA FALL FORUM AND FILMFEST

Our fellow BC Chapter Affiliate, SoVTA, hosted Catamount Trail Association's 'Backcountry Fall Forum and FilmFest' in early November at Mt. Snow's Discovery Center this year. WMBA held a table for the event and got a chance to meet a whole lot of great folks in the community—and get stoked for the upcoming season watching the [Winter Wildland's touring FilmFest](#). Our friends at [VT Huts](#) were in attendance hyping their newest build at Grout Pond in southern VT (time to queue up for a reservation...), and congrats to Mary Misavage (friend of OG WMBA member Rob Painter) who took home the coveted Weston snowboard in the raffle! All said and done, this event was a lot of fun and we're thankful for the work that our hard charging brothers/sisters at SoVTA put in to make it happen!



THE BACKCOUNTRY RESPONSIBILITY CODE

In skiing we are our best selves. And by skiing we mean sliding over snow on whatever you've got - be it a lunch tray, a splitboard, an inflatable dragon, skinny skis or a 1000cc snow pony. Together we can keep the backcountry open, accessible, inclusive, and protected.

<p>ski no trace</p> <p>Take only photos, leave only tracks. Keep our water clean. Pack out your poop. And your dog's poop. Don't trash the backcountry. #tagresponsibly #packitout @leavenotracecenter</p>	<p>ski self-reliant</p> <p>Carry what you need. Be prepared for worst-case scenario. Practice rescues. Don't put yourself where you can't get out.</p>	<p>ski inclusive</p> <p>Share it. Everyone's welcome. Find a mentor. Be a mentor. Acknowledge native stewardship. Be a positive part of the community.</p>
<p>ski aware</p> <p>Avalanches ruin lives. Get educated. Understand snowpack, terrain and conditions. Know the forecast. Be aware of other people. Have a plan. Be prepared to change it. Keep your eyes and mind open. #KBYG</p>	<p>ski respectful</p> <p>Be nice. Make space. Park appropriately. Respect closures, guidelines and other users. Don't pothole or pee in the skintrack. Look before you ski. #RecreateResponsibly</p>	<p>ski smart</p> <p>Know your gear. Know your limits. Keep skills sharp. Check beacons. Dig pits. Avoid risky terrain and conditions. Live to ski another day.</p>
	<p>ski kind</p> <p>Do right by others. Be a good neighbor. Help out. Don't be a jerk. Be kind even to someone who's being a jerk.</p>	

@ski_kind #skikind skikind.org

Interested in advertising with us? Want to be a sponsor? Donate a culvert? Email us: andymathey@gmail.com



WMBA in the News:

Just in case you missed it, WMass Backcountry Alliance was featured in the [New England Ski Journal's December 2022 issue](#). For this annual Backcountry edition they

interviewed WMBA founder, Andy Mathey, on the role the organization has taken to develop backcountry terrain in WMass. With high profile trails, like the Thunderbolt on Mt. Greylock, experiencing increasingly heavy use, one of our primary goals is to help disperse this impact by adding more self-powered skiing and riding options throughout the region. We believe that 'a rising tide lifts all ships' and that by working together, our ski community can expand the quantity of backcountry zones in WMass, while also increasing the quality of what is already being managed. There is a lot of ski history here, from the NY border to the Wapack range, Williamstown to Mt. Washington, and dozens of forgotten, overgrown, and abandoned ski trails between. With a nod to our CCC history, the local legends and ski pioneers hailing from WMass, we would like to take a moment to bask in some overdue attention paid to our awesome region! Thank you New England Ski Journal for noticing our efforts----but don't blink because we have bigger plans yet...

■ BACKCOUNTRY



By Josh Laskin

The excitement grew as I pulled into the parking lot of the Maple Villa ski zone in Bartlett, N.H. A fresh coating of snow from the night prior enveloped the landscape, creating the perfect opportunity to grab a quick pre-work lap at a new backcountry ski zone established by nonprofit organization Granite Backcountry Alliance.

But upon arrival, I found the parking lot filled, despite it only being 7 a.m. A sizable portion of the license plates were from states other than New Hampshire.

It's no secret that the popularity of backcountry skiing has skyrocketed over the past few years. Mainstream media outlets are constantly publishing "how-to" articles aimed at getting resort skiers into the backcountry—a frequently searched topic, fueled by a growing frustration about crowded, overpriced and under-delivering ski resorts.

In Massachusetts, the increase in popularity is just as evident as in places like

Western Mass. Backcountry Alliance aims to expand state's skiing options



Western Mass. But until recently, nobody had been tackling the lack of backcountry ski zones in the Commonwealth. Instead, skiers would head toward one of the few established—and often crowded—areas in their state, like Mount Greylock's Thunderbolt Ski Trail. Or, they drive a bit farther to developed areas in Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine. But even in states like Vermont and New Hampshire, which have organizations actively working to increase skiable out-of-bounds terrain, there has been a struggle to keep up with the increasing demand at some of the most popular backcountry ski zones.

Andy Mathey, a skier native to the Berkshires, couldn't help but notice what Granite Backcountry Alliance was doing, expanding backcountry ski areas in New Hampshire, and what the Ridgepole Outdoor Collective (formerly RASTA) had been doing in Vermont before that. He began thinking about whether or not a similar model might work in his state.

"I was hiking in the area where (R&S-

TA) was establishing glades," Mathey said. "I saw these signs and thought to myself, 'Geez, this is awesome!' I hiked down into the glades and saw all the signage at the road crossing and realized I really wanted to do this."

It was 2012, and Mathey was beginning to see potential in his own backyard for what was already being done in states to the north. After doing some research and making a number of phone calls to the Ridgepole Outdoor Collective, Catamount Trails Association and the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation in an effort to explore the possibility of establishing official backcountry ski zones in his area, the ball was set in motion. After proving to the CTR that there was interest in such an effort through trail day participation at a defined ski area (which took place during fall 2021) and by starting a Facebook group that quickly gained what is now over a thousand members, they eventually agreed to just what would become the Western Massachusetts Backcountry Alliance, the first out-of-state chapter.

While there are a few existing backcountry ski zones in central and western Massachusetts, these areas are few and far between and get extremely crowded on a good snow day. Mathey's hope is to create enough new zones to help disperse skier traffic throughout the state.

"Right now, everyone goes to the Thunderbolt on Greylock—hark! the iconic!" Mathey said. "But if you go there on a weekend, it's crazy. My, and the board's, plan is to have a network of backcountry zones in our region that kind of spread out impact."

Already, the organization has established a new zone at a former range at President Beartown Ski Area, which has been inoperable since 1966, and has additional projects in the works.

Like many of the forgo-



Margret Sylva works a turn of fall on Mt. Washington



ten ski trails throughout New England, the trails at Beartown and other potential backcountry zones through central and western Massachusetts were built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s and early 1940s—the direct result of President Roosevelt's New Deal. According to Mathey, many of these trails were built in north-facing bowls and chutes that collect snow through the winter and experience limited sun, making them perfect for the modest snowfall received in Massachusetts.

The New Deal was a series of programs and policies created in an attempt to pull the U.S. out of the Great Depression by creating jobs, providing economic relief and reforming the financial system, all while addressing infrastructure issues throughout the country. The CCC was

just one of many programs created by the New Deal and employed nearly 3 million young men who planted trees, built roads and built trails—the same ski trails that have been revitalized and are frequently skied today throughout New England. In fact, many popular New England ski areas like Cannon and Stowe were developed around these historic ski trails. Others, like the Sherburne Trail on Mount Washington, have continued to see use since their construction nearly a century ago.

Over the years, these historic ski trails helped spawn popular New England ski destinations—North Conway, Jackson and Stowe—that we know and love today. Now, the trails continue to give back to the people they were intended to serve, especially as the desire for human-powered lifts grows.

"There's a lot of sadness about these ski areas that are in the past, but the way I look at it, they're not in the past anymore," said Mathey. "When I'm up there, I'm thinking, my grandfather was probably making turns on this trail that I'm now cutting saplings out of. These mountains are going to come back alive. To me that's a really cool feeling."

Introducing OUR New BC Zone:

Berkshire Snow Basin

We are thrilled to announce our newest backcountry zone, Berkshire Snow Basin, in West Cummington! WMBA management of the Snow Basin is made possible through a partnership with MA Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) to maintain the former ski area within Bryant State Forest for wintertime recreation. DCR's primary designation of Bryant S.F is for wildlife habitat, and it is important to note that **all non-winter recreation activity is prohibited**, as per State regulations. This recreation limitation includes mountain bike use, and all unauthorized trail building is also prohibited.

Our management area of Berkshire Snow Basin includes all of the former ski trails maintained across the 300+ acre north-facing bowl at the time the resort closed in 1989. While WMBA is not authorized to cut any new trails, our multi-year project goal is to clean and glade the trails to their original



margins, and to return Snow Basin to a fully skiable—though strictly self-powered—mountain. With a base elevation at 1200' and a northern aspect that is ideal for catching and holding snow, Berkshire Snow Basin will soon be home to the finest mid-angle backcountry tree skiing in southern New England (with a few steps too!) 550'

WINTER PARKING ETIQUETTE

- PARK LEGALLY
- PARK SAFELY & RESPONSIBLY
- PARK TIGHT TO MAXIMIZE SPACE
- GET IN & GET OUT
- HAVE A PLAN "B" IN CASE THE LOT IS FULL WHEN YOU ARRIVE
- BE GRATEFUL FOR THE PLOW PEOPLE!

CATAMOUNT TRAIL ASSOCIATION

VERMONT BACKCOUNTRY ETHICS

~ Leave Nothing But Tracks ~

1. PLAN AHEAD & PREPARE

- Practice safety first.
- Know where you are going.
- Know your own and your group's limits, and minimize risks.

2. TRAVEL ON DURABLE SURFACES

- Stay on deep snow cover whenever possible.

3. DISPOSE OF WASTE PROPERLY

- Pack it in. Pack it out.

4. LEAVE THINGS AS THEY ARE

- Leave only tracks. No unauthorized cutting.

5. MINIMIZE CAMPFIRE & HUT IMPACTS

- Use a lightweight stove for cooking and enjoy a lantern for light.
- Leave huts and cabins in better shape than how you found them.

6. RESPECT WILDLIFE

- Observe wildlife from a distance. Do not follow or approach wildlife. Winter is an especially vulnerable time for animals.

7. BE CONSIDERATE OF OTHERS

- Any maintenance or cutting can be done only with permission, as part of an authorized project or program. Respect landowners, both public and private.
- Respect other skiers/riders and all other users.
- When ascending trails, keep clear and yield to downhill traffic. Avoid booting and snowshoeing in skin or ski tracks. When descending always stay in control, go one at a time, and slow down near others.
- Respect designated areas, signs and wildlife.

© Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics, 2014. This copyrighted information is based on the Leave No Trace Principles, and was developed in partnership with the following organizations. For more information on Leave No Trace, visit www.LNT.org.



WWW.VTBC.ORG | WWW.CATAMOUNTTRAIL.ORG

of vertical drop, and a low-angle 'dedicated' skin-track (Sugar Run) also makes for perfect mornings of multiple laps or before/after work runs.

Our redevelopment of Berkshire Snow Basin as a WMBA managed backcountry zone, of course, is a multi-year project and will require a considerable amount of volunteer hours to cut and swamp brush, to clean the trails and keep them clear, to build kiosks, mount signage, and more. The end result, however, will be an amazing winter recreation resource unlike any other in the region---and

one that is managed entirely by community support. If you are not yet a WMBA member, consider joining to help us realize this goal. Attend our Fall trail work days next season, since this is also the best way to meet the community and to get to know the terrain. Your WMBA membership not only connects you with the community—providing access to local snow conditions, trail reports, group tours, and meet-ups—but it also includes a host of additional perks from our parent organization, Catamount Trail Association, like their annual Rewards Book with thousands of dollars of savings on ski related items and services. Click [here to become a CTA member](#) and choose WMBA as your local backcountry Chapter Affiliate. For more info on the history of Berkshire Snow Basin check out the [NELSAP](#) and [New England Ski History](#) websites.



**BERKSHIRE SNOW BASIN
BACKCOUNTRY SKI ZONE**
West Cummington, MA

Berkshire Snow Basin exists as a partnership between WMass Backcountry Alliance (WMBA) and MA DCR at Bryant State Forest. MA DCR maintains this area exclusively for wildlife habitat, and only self-powered wintertime recreation is allowed.

All non-winter recreation is prohibited.

Absolutely no unauthorized trail clearing is allowed.

Always ski/ride within Bryant State Forest boundaries and respect all neighboring private property.

Park vehicles to maximize efficiency. If the parking area is full, consider alternate 'plan b' touring options for the day. Under no circumstances is parking along Rt. 9 ever allowed.

Ski Kind.
Access to this and other backcountry zones is a responsibility and not a right. Please respect these rules so that we may all continue enjoying Berkshire Snow Basin in the future.

All MA DCR regulations apply.

Backcountry Safety Information

Emergency: Call 911

You are entering a remote and unpatrolled area where hidden hazards and changing weather exist. It is your responsibility to be prepared for emergency situations in backcountry terrain. Always carry a first aid kit, food, water and extra clothes. Cell service may be poor or non-existent and emergency assistance slow to respond. Never ski/ride alone.

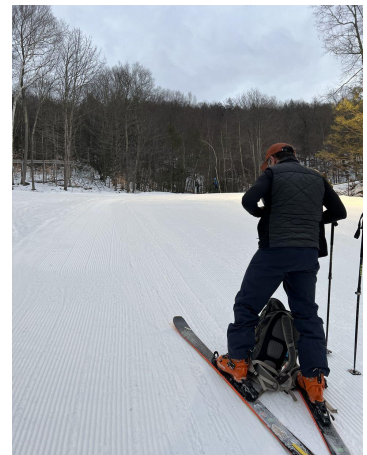
***Please be aware that our work at Berkshire Snow Basin is just beginning. Most of the trails are overgrown and still filled with saplings, trail signs are non-existent and other infrastructure not yet in place. For this season, and perhaps the next, Snow Basin is 'ski at your own risk' and appropriate only for the more adventurous who are familiar with and prepared for non-managed backcountry terrain. Never ski alone. If the parking area is unplowed, ABSOLUTELY do not park along RT 9, or in any way that could upset the neighboring community.**

WMBA Events Schedule

We've got a variety of events planned for this winter to help get folks out onto the snow, connect to the community, and maybe gently push our comfort zones a little...

FRIDAY MORNING 'DAWN PATROLS' AT BERKSHIRE EAST

With the first Berkshire East Dawn Patrol of the season already under our belt, we'll continue to meet just before 7am every Friday morning at the parking in front of Bobcat Trail for a morning skin-up the mountain. This is a newbie-friendly, 'no drop' event and great if you are learning your equipment or just want to climb with other folks. Please arrive early to be ready to start uphill at 7am, especially if you have new gear and questions about use. Come with layers to shed, plenty of water, snacks and a [Berkshire East uphill/seasons pass!](#)

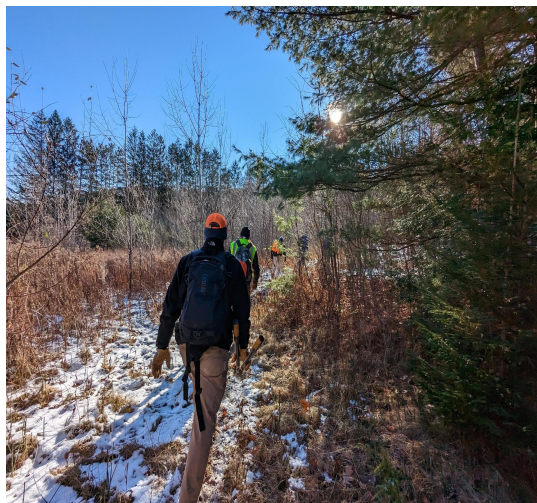
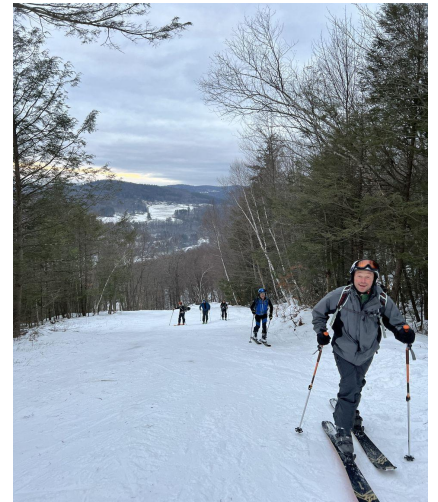


The Dawn Patrol events are open to WMBA members and non-members. For updates on Berkshire East uphill status or Dawn Patrol cancellations, please email wmba.contact@gmail.com 24 hours prior.

'WELCOME TO OUR ZONES' GROUP TOURS

WMass Backcountry Alliance now has two managed backcountry ski zones to explore. If you are itching to check them out, but unsure of where to park, how to find the skin track, where the best lines are for your ability level, and where to exit—then come out and spend the morning with us to learn the ropes.

We'll meet in a small group of 4-5 skiers at Beartown Backcountry and Berkshire Snow Basin a few times throughout the season with dates to be announced on the [WMBA website](#). Possibilities exist for more advanced tours into unmanaged backcountry terrain of WMass, as well—weather dependent of course! 'Welcome To Our Zones' tours are available only to WMBA members and require advanced sign-up. Please note that these are hosted



events—opportunities to meet to ski together---and not 'guided' tours.

WMBA does not propose any guide service, and our meet-up events are always free of charge.

ZEALAND HUT TOUR IN THE WMNF

Join us as we spend two nights at the historic backcountry Zealand Falls Hut in the White Mountain National Forest of New Hampshire this winter. We've reserved 10 beds for the nights of March 10th and 11th (Fri+Sat) for WMBA members with the reservation code. Costs are paid directly to the AMC (\$37/Fri, \$62/Sat non-AMC members). [Contact WMBA](#) for more information on this trip and the required code for accessing our reservation. Availability is first come/first serve.

Here is what John Goodman has to say in his excellent '[Best Backcountry Skiing in the Northeast](#)' guidebook:

"The AMC's Zealand Falls Hut serves as a base for skiing in and around the Pemigewasset Wilderness. The ski tours from the hut access a beautiful and dramatic landscape of ice cliffs, waterfalls, and high alpine ponds...Zealand Notch is one of the more dramatic land formations in the White Mountains....A ski tour through the notch usually involves stopping every few minutes just to marvel at the views."

Go to '[Zealand Falls Hut](#)' on the Appalachian Mountain Club website for more information about what to expect on a winter stay.



Meet a Board Member: Dave O'Neil

Dave came to the Pioneer Valley in 1998 from Waltham, Massachusetts to study horticulture at UMass Amherst and never left. He earned an Associates from UMass Stockbridge School of Agriculture in Horticulture before gaining his BA in Greenhouse Crop Production.

Dave has spent most of his career involved in the 'green industry' and for the last six years as a horticultural technician at the UMass College of Natural Science Research and Education greenhouses.

He has skied his entire life, and for the last six seasons worked professionally as a PSIAA level 1 instructor/coach for the Berkshire East developmental team. His interest in backcountry skiing started about 10 years ago after serendipitously watching the ski mountaineering portion of the Inferno classic during a winter camping trip to Hermit lake in the White Mountains. Upon return, he quickly went out and purchased a VERY heavy frame binding and soon received his AIARE level 1 certificate.

Dave believes that a home-grown backcountry skiing community in western Massachusetts will benefit our greater community through increased economic development, improved access to shared natural resources, and by lowering the barriers of entry for marginalized populations to outdoor recreation like backcountry skiing.

David is the vice chair of the WMBA and resides with his wife and children in Charlemont, Massachusetts.



SHOUT OUT TO OUR SPONSORS

On behalf of all of our 'trail dog' work volunteers this season, we'd like to give a HUGE thank you to [Barrington Coffee](#) in Lee, for the near limitless supply of fresh roasted beans they donated. It was probably because of this amazing coffee that we brewed fresh every work morning that our volunteers were able to get sooooo much done---I mean, we cleared the entire upper rope tow at Beartown!

Thank you to [Katalyst Kombucha](#), in Greenfield, who will be supplying us with healthy post-workout hydration on our Friday Dawn Patrol events this season. Katalyst is a worker-owned co-op and has the best ginger kombucha on the planet, in our humble opinion!

And as always, we've got much love for Matt Williams, Greg Maino and the team at our parent organization, [Catamount Trail Association](#), who work so hard to secure and maintain access to the outdoor places we enjoy so much all winter long. Thank you!

And thank you for subscribing to our newsletter. We hope to see you out on the trails and in the woods this winter. Please reach out any time!

Cheers,

Andy Mathey, Chair

WMass Backcountry Alliance
wmba.contact@gmail.com
<https://www.wmassbcalliance.org/>

