



Friends board members and staff were jumping for joy at Chickatawbut Tower—literally—when Jen Klein joined the organization.

Please Welcome Jen Klein, Your New Executive Director

A new era in the history of the Friends of the Blue Hills began on March 4, when Jen Klein joined this organization as your new Executive Director. Jen brings a unique background and a wealth of expertise from her two-decade career spanning roles in public and non-profit organizations devoted to conservation, education, and recreation.

Most recently, Jen served as Director of Outdoor Experience for the Trustees of the Reservation. She spearheaded significant growth in outdoor programming, forged crucial partnerships with organizations promoting diversity in outdoor spaces, and created innovative initiatives to reach underserved urban communities.

Jen holds a Ph.D. in Interdisciplinary Studies and teaches courses in Outdoor Education, Environmental Justice and Urban Ecology Systems at both Les-

ley and Johnson and Wales Universities. The Detroit native has made an impact in New England, serving in state, county and local government and school districts. She is currently the President of the Massachusetts Environmental Education Society.

Board President Matt Panucci says, “We are beyond excited that Jen has joined us. Her leadership, passion, and commitment to fostering a connection between people and nature align perfectly with our organization’s mission. I’m confident that, under her guidance, we’ll continue to advocate for actions to protect and enhance the park... and expand efforts to engage the next generation of outdoor enthusiasts throughout greater Boston and beyond.”

Jen is a natural fit for the Friends. If you see her in the hills, please do say hello!

Accessible Trails

A Focus for 2024

There are so many ways to enjoy the 7,000 acres of the Blue Hills Reservation. On foot, wheels, or horseback, its 125 miles of trails will take you into the wilderness and back. But it takes a village to keep all these paths passable and safe.

This year, Quincy resident and board member Bob Quinn is leading efforts to improve trails in the park with accessibility in mind. Bob notes, "Visitors with mobility challenges can be a little intimidated, so we're looking at ways to make trails more accessible and bridges and boardwalks wider. The first part of this effort is to survey trails that could meet accessibility guidelines and gauge needed improvements. The goal is to make the Blue Hills Reservation inviting to all no matter how they travel the trails."

Bob knows his way around the Blue Hills – he has been doing trail work for some 15 years, and is a member of the 125-Mile Club.

Saturday meetups and other trail maintenance events just for corporate groups have crews of up to 25 volunteers, depending on the size of the work area and the



Before



After

Dimeo Construction volunteers replaced the old walkway on the South Skyline Trail with a new bridge. Even better access is part of the 2024 plan.

work done. Once provided with gloves, tools and other equipment by the Friends, volunteers are guided by trained leaders to trim brush, clear branches and invasive plants, repair trails, and channel water away from paths. Refreshments celebrate putting another part of the park back into good working order.

Check out our calendar at friendsofthebluehills.org and volunteer or reach out to Volunteer Coordinator Julia Milot at julia@friendsofthebluehills.org to set up an event for your group.

Partner Profile

Widowmaker Brewing

Since 2023, Widowmaker Brewing in Braintree has shown their love of the Blue Hills by having hikes start and end at their location on Wood Road, just steps away from the park. The Widow Walker hikes (aka Boots and Brews) have proven popular—hundreds of people have participated. And the 2024 season is just starting!

Widowmaker owner Ryan Lavery says, "We love working with the Friends of the Blue Hills! Not only are you our guides on our Widow Walks (and at times the only ones who know how to get the group back to the brewery), but you help maintain and champion one of our favorite places on the South Shore... the Blue Hills! We could not begin to count the amount of times we have poured a well-earned round of beers for groups who just finished a hike, and we love that we can be part of that experience."

Visit the calendar at friendsofthebluehills.org to sign up for Widow Walker hikes all season long.



Boots and Brews hikers get to enjoy the park and relax post-hike with Widowmaker.

Invasive Species

The Battle for the Blue Hills Is On

Non-native plants, including the ones shown here, have been a threat to the long-term sustainability of the Blue Hills ecosystem for ages. But Friends of the Blue Hills trail maintenance warriors continue to battle invasive species that have come into the area.

Here are 5 ways invasives harm the park:

1. Habitat disruption by outcompeting native plants for sunlight, water, and nutrients.
2. Decreased biodiversity due to aggressive growth.
3. Altered soil composition by influencing nutrient cycling and microbial activity. Garlic mustard is known for this.
4. Erosion and degraded soil from root systems that don't stabilize soil well. More sediment then adds up in bodies of water.
5. Management challenges needing lots of time, effort, and resources to monitor spread, remove invasives and educate the public.



Top left: Garlic mustard was no match for Nadia at last year's Green Up event.

Top right: Mile-a-minute vines try to take over Fowl Meadow, but volunteers help keep it from happening.



Left: Black swallow-wort being removed—with a smile—on Great Blue Hill.

A Celebration of Community at Winterfest

The Blue Hills Ski Area was buzzing with excitement on February 27. Winterfest again brought together local lovers of the Blue Hills in celebration of the season.

Local kitchens vied for the title of Blue Hills chili champion. Almost 150 Winterfest revelers voted for their favorite, and a special judges' panel selected their top choice, too. Northern Spy won the judges' choice award, and Orchard Cove was the pick of the people.

There was something for everyone: discounted skiing, lively music by the band Songs for Ceilidh, arts and crafts, plus Widowmaker Brewing with their craft beers.

Huge thanks go to sponsors Morgan Stanley: McGowan Group and Orchard Cove plus the Norfolk County Sheriff's office for attending. Bishop Feehan High School students and Friends of the Blue Hills member volunteers were invaluable.



"It was so nice seeing the community come together. It was unseasonably warm, and everyone was excited to be there. The Friends of the Blue Hills has a great group of members!"

—Nicole Rinnig
Orchard Cove

Ready to take up arms against invasives?

Join us at the **Green Up the Blue Hills** event at Ponkapoag Pond on Sunday, April 21 at 12 pm. We'll be pulling garlic mustard all around the AMC cabins, but there will be snacks and fun activities as well. To sign up or get details, visit friendsofthebluehills.org/calendar. **Go next level – Adopt a Forest.** Adopt a section of the park to keep the Blue Hills ecosystems healthy and free from invasive plants. Reach out to julia@friendsofthebluehills.org about it.

Special Memories of the Blue Hills Create a Champion

Long-time Friends of the Blue Hills Champion Trish Babb hadn't visited the park before moving to Milton from Roslindale. She says, "My late husband (Stuart) knew the Blue Hills long before I did."

Now she describes the park as "my sanity place" and visits at least weekly. She even took a "cold plunge" into Houghton's Pond this past winter. Her favorite spot is the former campsite of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC)

formed during the Depression. When Stu passed away in 2021, Trish sponsored a trail to the CCC site, which is marked by a special plaque.

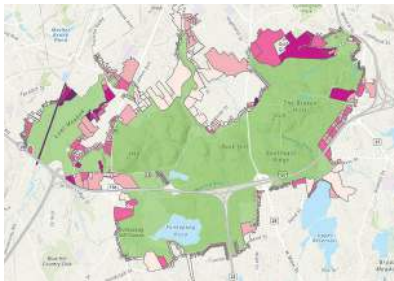
"The Blue Hills are a big part of my life," says Trish. "It just makes sense to support it. There is nothing like being in the woods and in the fresh air. I even got engaged in the Blue Hills, and it's where my youngest child learned to ski and snowboard."



Stuart and Trish Babb

Joining Trish as a Blue Hills Champion is easy — and you'll protect the park every day of the year with your monthly donation. Visit friendsofthebluehills.org and click **Donate** to start helping the park!

What Is a Buffer Study?



Getting to know your neighbors is good advice when you move to a new town—and it's an important part of protecting public lands like the Blue Hills Reservation, too.

The recently completed Blue Hills Buffer Study is helping all of us get to know our neighbors in all six bordering

towns. It collected property boundary and zoning information for land next to the Reservation and put it into a detailed map. The color-coded map helps identify low, medium, or high risks associated with future development along the park's borders and describe actions that can be taken by the Friends, the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), and towns to protect and enhance the Reservation long term.

Join our committee! We are looking for volunteers to help identify potential zoning or development risks next to the Blue Hills. Email info@friendsofthebluehills.org if you're interested.

Thank You to Our Partners

We value your kindness and contributions and look forward to working with you in the year ahead.

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YES! I want to keep the Blue Hills trails and forests healthy for hiking and other recreational activities.

Please use my gift to maintain the trails, improve the habitat, and preserve native species against invasives to keep the wildlife and the woods safe for all visitors.

Enclosed is my gift of \$_____

Return this coupon with your check to: Friends of the Blue Hills
PO Box 416
Milton, MA 02186

Or give securely online at:
friendsofthebluehills.org/support

Submit Your Shots!

Our annual photo contest is now open for entries. Last year, 119 entries from photographers of all skill levels were submitted, and four of them were awarded prizes. The contest continues through



Labor Day, but don't delay! The winning photo may be on your phone or camera right now. Go to friendsofthebluehills.org/photo-contest-voting or use the QR code to submit your photos and vote for your favorites.

