



On February 25th, John Harrell from FBH and DCR staff surveyed potential post-fire research plots at the top of Houghton's Hill. Tree canopy coverage, tree and plant species, and rock coverage will be studied.

After the Fire: Tracking Habitat Recovery

From ash comes renewal—and a new study tracking the Blue Hills' path to recovery post-fire. Friends of the Blue Hills (FBH), with the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), is studying the effects of November's fire on the land near Houghton's Pond.

This research will examine plant diversity, native plant regrowth, and the spread of invasive species. Controlled study areas outside the burn zones will allow researchers to compare changes over time. Additionally, the study may explore tree data and potential impacts on bird habitats, providing valuable insight into how fire shapes the park's ecosystem.

To connect our community with this effort, we are offering an "Ashes to New Beginnings Hike" once a month. This guided hike will help participants understand the role of fire in eastern forests, from its historical significance—both indigenous and modern—to its ecological effects. Hikers will also learn key conservation practices, including Leave No Trace principles and land stewardship ethics. Plus, the hike will detail the process used to monitor biodiversity post-fire, offering a firsthand look at how the landscape recovers.

We know you want the Blue Hills to recover and thrive. This is one small way we are helping to make it happen.

Want to get involved?

Volunteers are essential to restoring and maintaining the Blue Hills. Whether you're passionate about conservation, interested in research, or just love the park, you are welcome! Sign up today in the Volunteer Opportunities section of our website.



History of the FBH Fire Brigade

With a past that predates DCR management of the Blue Hills Reservation and a present that reflects an ongoing threat of brush fires, you may wonder what firefighting was like when the Metropolitan District Commission (MDC) managed the park. If so, then this story is for you! Long-time FBH member Bruce Talanian was part of the all-volunteer Forest Fire Fighting Group (also called the Fire Brigade or Fire Committee) from 1986 to 2001. Talanian was gracious enough to share some of his personal experiences with the group.

A call for volunteers to join the Forest Fire Fighting Group went out on July 27, 1977, about a year after a group of Milton residents became the first official "Friends" of the park. According to FBH notes, the goal was to recruit 200 "woodswise, physically fit, trained and equipped fire fighters" to support professional firefighting departments of the border towns.

"At the time I joined, there were around 15 members," said Talanian. "I joined toward the tail end of it when [the group] was just starting to slow down." Talanian joined a few years before the brigade stopped accepting members and ultimately shut down.

The original location for the committee's headquarters was the "house on the hill," right next to the Ponkapoag skating rink in Canton. Towards the end of the brigade's existence, the headquarters moved to MEDITECH in a side building that was not in use. It wasn't until the mid-1990s when MEDITECH was being remodeled that the fire group moved again to the Milton police station, using one of their conference rooms to meet. Who knew that those places we see on our way around town are the places that once held meetings for our very own fire brigade!

Head over to our blog for more of the story.



Hello Friends!

Please give a warm welcome to the people and organizations who recently joined the Blue Hills community. We're happy you're here! This kind of dedicated support and partnership are what make protecting, preserving, and promoting your park possible.

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Trail Leader Meeting Recap

A Fresh Focus on Trail Leader Training

As anyone who has participated in an FBH trail maintenance event knows, the trails crisscrossing the Blue Hills don't take care of themselves. Downed trees, uncontrolled runoff, and even invasive plant growth can make any path unsafe and perhaps impassable. That's why trailwork is at the heart of the FBH mission. Now the new Volunteer and Education Program Manager, John Harrell, is taking trail maintenance training to the next level.

On Saturday, February 15th, FBH hosted about 15 existing volunteer leaders and trail adopters to roll out the new Trail Crew Training Program.

Expanding knowledge and skills. Trail crew leaders are expected to have strong base knowledge of the Blue Hills and how to conduct different kinds of trailwork in the park. A strong trail maintenance leader not only keeps the trails in good shape but also ensures they remain safe, sustainable, and well-documented for the future. By focusing on safety, data, and reporting, leaders contribute to the long-term viability of trails for current users and future generations.



To this end, a set of courses is rolling out to those interested in expanding their skillset around leadership, the history of the Blue Hills, and principles of stewardship. Other training courses will build on the basics and prep our trail crew leaders to conduct safety talks, assist crew members with personal protective equipment (PPE), effectively connect with crew members on trail, and support volunteer progress toward becoming leaders themselves if desired.

Perks of being a trail leader. One exciting benefit of being a trail crew leader is the opportunity to earn CPR and first-aid certifications. If you're interested in learning more about becoming a trail crew leader, please email john@friendsofthebluehills.org.

» To volunteer on a trail crew, visit the FBH website calendar and sign up today!

A promotional banner for "Green Up the Blue Hills" featuring photos of volunteers and text about the event. The banner includes the text "Green Up the Blue Hills" in a large, stylized font, followed by "THE BIGGEST STEWARDSHIP EVENT OF THE YEAR!". Below this, it says "Make a difference" and "one bag of garlic mustard at a time". A yellow circular badge in the center says "10 am - 1 pm Bring a picnic. Dessert is on us!". In the bottom left corner, there is a calendar icon and the text "Sign up today on the FBH website calendar!". The background shows a collage of photos of volunteers working on trails.



loved. He was passionate about the great outdoors and applied his expertise in plant ecology and passion for hiking when he joined the board. He hiked every trail in the reservation extensively. Rick advised and led volunteers in controlling invasive species across the reservation, gave talks on local ecology and climate change, did trailwork, and led hikes (including the night hike recently brought back as part of Winterfest).

In lieu of flowers, his family suggests making a donation in his name to one of the causes that he held dear: the UMass Boston Biology Graduate Research Fund (umb.edu/bgrf), Friends of the Blue Hills (bit.ly/FBH_InMemoryOf), or the Boston Cyclists Union (bit.ly/4hAOQ0i).

In Memoriam

Rick Kesseli, past president of the FBH Board of Trustees and dedicated park protector for more than 30 years, passed on February 9th, 2025, surrounded by his family. Rick was happiest in nature and with the people he



Winter Fun at Winterfest 2025

Moving Winterfest to a Friday in January proved to be a hit, with 300 attendees at the Blue Hills Ski Area for an evening of winter fun. This year's festival featured beloved traditions like the chili cookoff, discounted skiing, and live music—plus exciting new adds like tubing and a twilight hike.

The chili competition was fierce, with Northern Spy winning the Judges' Choice and Orchard Cove taking the Popular Vote. Lynn Jolicoeur and the Pulse kept spirits high with live music, while

Arc'teryx, Blue Hill Observatory, Brookwood Community Farm, New England Base Camp, Mass Audubon, and The Run House—Walpole with HOKA added to the festivities.

A huge thank you to the volunteers and sponsors Bank of Canton and Orchard Cove who made this free community event possible. We can't wait for an even bigger Winterfest in 2026!

Visit the blog on our website for a more detailed recap of the event.

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