



July 2016

Dear MMRG Member:

This letter provides a summer update between MMRG's bi-annual newsletters and provides news about a recent land acquisition, an article from "Our Board Outdoors", a project announcement, and our upcoming events calendar.

MMRG purchased our first conservation parcel, the 17-acre, ecologically important Branch River Conservation Area (BRCA), located in Wakefield between the villages of Union and Sanbornville. A few weeks after the purchase, we acquired additional land on the opposite bank of the BRCA, bringing the total area to 21 acres.

The 12-mile long Branch River is a headwater tributary system that receives water from Lovell Lake and streams that flow from the Moose Mountains Reservation. After flowing through the BRCA, Branch River continues through Union Meadows, then follows a southeasterly course, and discharges into the Salmon Falls River at Northeast Pond in Milton. The BRCA serves as a first link between the two conserved properties, the upstream Moose Mountains Reservation and the downstream Union Meadows. *Conserving the BRCA advances MMRG's mission to connect conserved lands and create natural corridors for wildlife and recreation.*

The acquisition of the BRCA was well received. The response to our fundraising appeal for the purchase and stewardship of the BRCA was exceptionally positive, with generous gifts from year-round and summer Wakefield residents, and from new and long-time MMRG members. In June, the BRCA was a stop on the Salmon Falls Watershed Collaborative's educational field trip for water quality professionals from government, planning and conservation groups. Part of the tour included MMRG's presentation about the ecological values of headwater streams, as characterized by the BRCA. Highlights of the BRCA's conservation values with a site map were featured in the Spring 2016 newsletter, that can be downloaded from our website, www.mmrg.info/help-mmrg-purchase-the-branch-river-conservation-area/.



*Reflections in the Branch River at the BRCA.
Photo by Patti Connaughton-Burns.*

I recently experienced firsthand the BRCA's value as a wildlife and recreation corridor. On a warm Friday evening, my colleague Kari Lygren and I launched kayaks at the BRCA and discovered an ideal after-work paddle. The insistent call of redwing blackbirds and the melodic mating song of Baltimore orioles drowned out traffic noise from nearby Routes 16 and 153. When aggressive alder roots blocked our upstream paddle, we changed course and paddled downstream towards Union Meadows, where we saw a great blue heron foraging, an osprey soaring overhead, and a beaver's impressively engineered dam.

The BRCA is open to the public. We hope that you will enjoy it and ask that you treat this important natural resource with care.

MMRG continues to focus on our mission to conserve lands in the 7-town service area. A strategic conservation action plan that will guide our future, conservation project decision-making is our next challenging project. (See below: *What's New at MMRG*). Please do not hesitate to contact MMRG if you would like to discuss options for conserving land.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Patti Connaughton-Burns".

Patti Connaughton-Burns, *Executive Director*

Our Board Outdoors:
MMRG Board Member Lorrie Drake recounts ‘*The Treasure Down the Road*’

When we moved into our house in New Durham in 1986, my husband Brad and I knew little about the area. We were house hunting during the height of the real estate boom in New Hampshire, so we jumped at the chance to buy our first house on Kings Highway before someone else made an offer. The house was small and expensive (my parents’ opinion), but we soon discovered that our new home came with an unexpected bonus: the treasure down the road.

After our friends helped us move in, we invited them back for a meal and a hike in the woods across the street. The short hike turned into a long slog through unfamiliar woods, and we started to lose hope of finding our way home. Finally, we stumbled upon a dirt road that led us back to pavement. I can still remember the shock I felt when I looked up the street and recognized our own new mailbox.

We soon learned that the dirt road that led us out of the woods also led in the other direction to a natural treasure in the woods: Jones Pond. Jones Pond is located in the area now known as the Ellis R. Hatch Wildlife Management Area owned by NH Fish & Game. Local residents had mobilized to protect the land after a mobile home park was proposed for the site. Because townspeople chose conservation over development, instead of a collection of temporary homes, we discovered a lovely pond surrounded by forested hills. In the years that followed, we took full advantage of our neighbors’ foresight in preserving the area.



*Summer afternoon at Jones Pond, Ellis R. Hatch Wildlife Management Area.
Photo by Virginia Long.*

Although Jones Pond is considered ‘remote’, it’s actually only a mile from Kings Highway. We have hiked in, biked in, and traveled in on snowshoes and skis. We have skated on the pond in winter, and tried our hands at fly fishing in spring. We have seen mink, beavers, otters and osprey at the pond, and signs of moose, bears and bobcats in the woods.

Several years ago, we watched an amazing transformation occur when high water caused the dam to fail. After the pond drained, the original route of Jones Brook was revealed. Over the next few years, a succession of land plants replaced those relying on standing water.

Another transformation has occurred recently as NH Fish & Game funded the rebuilding of the dam and restoring of Jones Pond and its banks. The access road is still gated in summer, but the land near the pond is now park-like. The pond has filled in and is deep enough for stocked trout to survive the winter.

We’ve lived on Kings Highway for 30 years now, and seen lots of changes. Many new houses have been built, turning wilderness into yards and limiting our ability to wander in the woods wherever we choose. We are grateful that Jones Pond, our ‘treasure down the road’, will be wild forever.

Lorrie Drake joined the MMRG Board in 2011 and serves on the Educational Outreach and Special Events Committees.