

# Lone Tree Hill Saw Improvements in 2023

By Radha Iyengar

Belmont’s Lone Tree Hill Conservation area benefited from another year of conservation, restoration, and stewardship, thanks mainly to the efforts of the Land Management Committee for Lone Tree Hill (LMC). Many Belmontonians and visitors enjoy this 119-acre conservation property for walking, biking, viewing wildlife, and being out in nature.

The LMC was created through a memorandum of agreement between the town and McLean Hospital in 1999. The agreement outlined the development restrictions for the McLean Hospital campus. It also reserved approximately 119 acres of the campus as publicly accessible open space, including a new municipal cemetery, and placed conservation restrictions that specify the permitted uses of the property.

The LMC was created to establish and implement a land use and management plan for the newly created conservation area. Its mission is to provide sound conservation and management stewardship policies for Lone Tree Hill that protect the property’s natural and historic resources and allow passive recreation and educational use.

The LMC consists of nine members: four from the town, including representatives from the Cemetery Commissioner, Conservation Commission, Historic District Commission, and a Select Board appointee; four members appointed by McLean Hospital, and one member from The Trustees of Reservations, the holder of the conservation restrictions on the property.

The committee meets on the first Wednesday of each month.

Below are the 2023 highlights of the committee’s activities.



Map of Lone Tree Hill showing Parterre Ecological Services’ restoration area (cross-hatched area in upper right).

## Ecological restoration

Parterre Ecological Services was engaged again in 2023 to continue restoring woodland and meadow areas by controlling invasive plant species. In the spring, Parterre’s technicians treated garlic mustard with targeted herbicide applications.

In the summer, invasive woody species were treated in and around the meadow while knotweed colonies were kept from spreading. In the fall, woody invasive species including tree of heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*), white mulberry (*Morus alba*), and common buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*) were remediated at multiple locations surrounding the Great Meadow and in the Eastern Woods. The LMC is grateful to the Judy Record Conservation Fund for sharing the cost of all the work conducted by Parterre and to Joseph Hibbard for his guidance for the ecological restoration.

The LMC retains other vendors to mow the Great Meadow and the



Work by Parterre Ecological Services included identifying invasive plants such as the *Ailanthus* tree wrapped in black plastic.

trails. In the fall, the arborist firm Tree Specialists conducted maintenance work for the trees along the Pine Allee including crown reduction pruning of 55 white pines and removal of miscellaneous invasive trees and brush encroaching on the southeast border of the Allee. This work was made possible by a generous Judy Record Conservation Fund grant.

## Volunteer efforts

On April 22, the Belmont Citizens Forum (BCF) and the Judy Record Conservation Fund held their ninth annual Lone Tree Hill Volunteer Day. The volunteers included Girl Scouts Troop 82027, Cityside Subaru employees, M&T Bank employees, the Sai Group employees, and citizens from Belmont and the surrounding communities.

Many hands made light work. Efficient volunteers planted 40 white pine saplings along the Pine Allee. These new trees completed the replacement of the Allee’s missing pines and some of the saplings from the 2017 to 2019 and 2022 volunteer day plantings that did not prosper. At the adjacent meadow, the volunteers planted native wildflowers including slender-leaf mountain mint, short-toothed mountain mint, wild bergamot, white wood aster, blue wood aster, New England aster, and butterfly

weed (70 plant plugs of each species). By season’s end, these plants were starting to bloom.

At the other end of the property, volunteers collected 20 bags of trash, including rusted metal sheets and an old bed frame. Garlic mustard was pulled up and bagged in the same effort. The volunteers also closed an unauthorized bike trail and dismantled an abandoned improvised shelter.

On May 19, as part of the Belmont Day School Service Day, students pulled 16 bags of garlic mustard, supervised by Leonard Katz and Nancy Kougeas from the Belmont Conservation Volunteers group.

On November 5, 13 volunteers from BCF, LMC, and other Belmont citizens spread white pine wood chips along the Pine Allee. The wood chips were material from the white pine pruning work that was processed and left on site.

Most weekends in the spring and summer, Belmont Conservation Volunteers, a Sustainable Belmont working group, removed garlic mustard and other invasive plants at Lone Tree Hill, the McLean Barn, and at an abutting area at Rock Meadow. They also pulled knotweed after rainstorms, when the wet soil allowed volunteers to





Cut stem of an invasive plant painted with herbicide on Lone Tree Hill.

pull the entire plant up, roots and stalks, reducing the odds that the plant will resprout.

## McLean Barn

As reported in the [June/July 2023 BCF Newsletter](#), the McLean Barn, also known as the Brick Barn at Rock Meadow, was conveyed to the town in 2005 by McLean Hospital. The barn has been largely unused since that time. In response to several unsuccessful attempts to break into the barn by prying open the doors, the LMC engaged a

security services vendor to close and lock the barn doors more effectively.

Recently, the McLean Barn has been approved for the short-term storage of the White Memorial Field House lockers when the field house is demolished. The lockers will be reinstalled in the new ice rink.

On February 10 and March 3, the LMC gave tours of the McLean Barn to interested citizens in preparation for public discussions about the disposition of the barn and the best community uses of the space as allowed under the conservation restriction governing Lone Tree Hill land. A request for proposals for a facilitator to structure a public process for generating ideas for the reuse of the barn has not yet been issued. The LMC expects to issue this in 2024.

## Signage

The Department of Public Works has installed new “no parking—fire lane” signs at the bottom of the Coal Road turnout on Pleasant Street. This signage was approved by the fire and police departments and Select Board because unauthorized vehicles were parking in that area.

The Greater Boston New England Mountain Biking Association has donated signs stating new rules, including the prohibiting of rogue trails. These signs will be installed by the end of 2024.

## Responsible use of Lone Tree Hill

The committee would like to remind the public that dogs must be on leashes measuring six feet or less. The presence of free-running dogs stresses a broad spectrum of wildlife, particularly ground-nesting birds, as well as walkers, cyclists, and dogs being walked on leash. Dog owners shall remove all feces created by their dogs on the property.

The LMC would also like to solicit your help in preserving this open space. If you see signs of unauthorized trails or happen upon a trail being constructed, please contact us by sending an email to [lonetreehillbelmont@gmail.com](mailto:lonetreehillbelmont@gmail.com).

*Radha Iyengar is the Select Board appointee and co-chair of the Land Management Committee for Lone Tree Hill, treasurer and board member of the Belmont Citizens Forum, and Precinct 8 Town Meeting member.*

# Profiles in Belmont: Julia Blatt

by Elissa Ely

Shortly after the pandemic began, when the only response within anyone’s control was isolation, Julia Blatt and her husband bought kayaks. They had canoed as a family for more than 30 years—Montana, Idaho, Maine, Colorado, Florida, Vermont, New Hampshire—and for years her professional work had taken her kayaking through the Concord, Sudbury, and Assabet rivers. Sometimes she brought politicians with her (a form of visual education) and sometimes it was a form of solo field research.

But this was different. The sky doesn’t know a pandemic is raging; birds and turtles have no idea and less interest. The river is simply itself. “Most people,” Julia says, “experience rivers as something they cross on the road.” But during COVID, the rivers were the road. Over the next months, Julia and her husband kayaked along about 15 of them.

Julia Blatt has been executive director of the Massachusetts River Alliance since 2009, but rivers have been her road in one way or another starting in 1987. She was an aide to former Congressman Chet Atkins after college (Brown University: Modern European History) when staff divided up local issues in need of attention. In those days—imagine!—no one wanted to take the environment. She took it, and never let go.

Julia grew up in Sudbury, along a river but not on it. “I had no idea such a beautiful piece of nature was in town,” she says. “All I knew was that we crossed it on the way to Wayland and Lincoln.” Her family shared “an abundance of unconditional love,” though not for outdoorsmanship. One of their greater pleasures was reading together for hours in contented silence.

Still, the outdoors called. In the woods beyond the small backyard her father fondly mowed, she loved toads and salamanders and capturing lightning bugs (also, to be clear, letting them go). “What drew me outside was animals,” she explains. “I’d like to say something sophisticated, but really, I just love animals.”

She thought about becoming a Jacques Cousteau, or maybe a professional violinist, or maybe a



Julia Blatt.

psychologist, or maybe a rabbi. She felt certain she didn’t have a scientist’s mind. It was karma when no one in the congressman’s office cared to take the environmental assignment.

Julia began with the most elemental (yet most intelligent) strategy: she called local organizations to ask what they wanted. She learned that the Sudbury Land Trust wanted the Sudbury River to be designated—and therefore, protected—as a Wild and Scenic River. She also learned that this was far more complicated on water than on land; for starters, who owns a river, and where does its flow begin and end?

Eleven years of town meetings, surveys, collaboration with the Park Service, votes, and legislation followed. It led to a graduate degree in urban and environmental policy and launched a river career. Now the Sudbury, Taunton, Nashua, and Westfield rivers have Wild and Scenic protection status. In