Report of the Chapter Chair

Mission and Vision. The mission of the Appalachian Mountain Club is to foster the protection, enjoyment and understanding of the outdoors. We envision a world where being outdoors is an integral part of people's lives; where our natural resources are healthy, loved and protected.

The year 2020 may prove to be one that most of us want to remember as well as forget.

When I stood for election as Chapter Chair in November 2019, none of us had any idea what was coming. A month later, in December 2019, the newly elected Chapter Executive Committee spent most of a Saturday together in Greenfield MA, focused on our 2020 budget plan and goals. It was fun! We were sitting close together, in a smallish room. We were talking and eating, and nobody was wearing a face mask. Everyone was excited and engaged, and we were looking forward to the year to come.

One of the most surprising and unexpected discussions at that meeting focused on the chapter's name.

Our newly-elected Vice Chair, Heather Wyman (a long-serving volunteer), blew everyone away with a persuasive and well-researched argument that the chapter's name—the Berkshire Chapter—was not representative of the entire region we serve, and that we likely limiting our audience of members and participants by fostering a
perception that our chapter was entirely focused on activities and issues affecting the Berkshires. In actuality, our chapter serves the four counties that comprise Western Massachusetts: Berkshire, Franklin, Hampden and Hampshire. We decided at that December meeting to explore whether and how we might change our chapter name to be more inclusive of all the regions we serve and appeal to a broader population of potential members.

Also at that meeting, our Mountaineering Committee alerted us to a unique opportunity to support the establishment of a new climbing area in our region. A group led by the Western Massachusetts Climbing Coalition (WMCC) had purchased a newly-available parcel of undeveloped land in Sandisfield MA. This parcel was notable in that it contained Hanging Mountain, a pristine mountain crag ideal for climbing. The Mountaineering Committee proposed that the chapter contribute funds to help defray the acquisition cost and also contribute volunteer labor to help build and maintain the necessary climbing infrastructure. They argued that this new Hanging Mountain climbing area would be akin to a new Mount Greylock opening to the public, and that the chapter’s support would put us at the forefront of expanding opportunities for climbers in our region and beyond. The Executive Committee agreed to make a substantial financial contribution in early 2020.

Two additional significant commitments were agreed to at the December 2019 planning meeting: (1) we would attempt to rebuild a vibrant paddling committee and community, under new leadership; and (2) we would invest significant resources in chapter initiatives to expand diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice.

Until mid-March 2020, the chapter was operating in its normal, mostly quiescent mode with activities limited to winter hikes, ski and snowshoe trips. Then everything went (metaphorically) south, with the onset of the coronavirus pandemic. All activities were halted, trails and facilities were closed. This situation persisted for three months until mid-June, when AMC cautiously restarted some activities with extensive COVID-19 safety protocols in place, including a new and specialized training regime for any volunteer leaders willing to lead trips during the pandemic.

Chapter activities and programs during the second half of 2020 were severely constrained. Some leaders chose to resume leading under the new safety protocols, but many understandably stayed on the sidelines.

Although 2020 was not anything like the year we had expected it would be, despite it all, chapter members and leaders proved to be resilient in the face of an unprecedented public health crisis. These are some highlights of chapter accomplishments in 2020:

- **Trail workers on the Appalachian Trail (AT) and New England Scenic Trail (NET) completed nearly 6000 hours of volunteer labor.** Trails were repaired, blowdowns cleared, and multiple tent sites were built and maintained.
• The Bicycling Committee led seven rides, making us one of the few chapters leading bike trips in 2020. Four of the rides took place in the Berkshires, and attracted new participants from surprising distances beyond the chapter’s usual service area.

• The Conservation Committee advocated for a range of important issues, including the Great American Outdoors Act, utility-scale solar siting regulations, old growth forest protection, and more. The Committee added a co-chair to support its work.

• The Justice, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (JDEI) Committee was formed and built an enthusiastic and growing community. The committee ran multiple online programs to give voice to diverse voices, and began investing in leadership development for underrepresented members of our communities.

• The Family Programs committee organized several trips specifically designed for family groups – parents and non-adult children. Indoor climbing, ice skating, and river cleanup activities were especially popular.

• The Mountaineering Committee was active both before and during the pandemic, with indoor and outdoor trips and collaborations with other partners. They played a leadership role within the AMC to develop COVID safe climbing protocols. Thanks to their leadership, the chapter contributed $8000 to the Western Massachusetts Climbing Coalition in support of the Hanging Mountain land acquisition.

• Outings continued apace, offering more than 30 hikes during the year, and adding three new trip leaders. The Tuesday Hiking series was interrupted by the pandemic but resumed later in the year, albeit with reduced regularity.

• The Paddling Committee was rebuilt thanks to the volunteer leadership of three outstanding women. They re-engaged with volunteer paddling leaders, forged a strong collaboration with AMC’s Worcester Chapter, developed new operating policies & procedures, and ran paddling trips in October and November.

• The Training and Education Committee took full advantage of the shift to online operations. Committee leaders organized countless sessions, including a fully online refresher training series for trip leaders. They created a COVID resources page for trip leaders on the chapter’s public website, developed and piloted new diversity, equity and inclusion training, and supported many other chapter and club level training initiatives.

The Chapter held its Annual Business Meeting (aka the “Berkshire Bash”) fully online via Zoom on Friday, November 6th. The slate of officers and committee chairs shown below was elected unanimously.
On the morning of the chapter’s Annual Business Meeting, we received word that the AMC’s Board of Directors had approved the chapter’s request to change its name from the “Berkshire Chapter” to the “Western Massachusetts Chapter.” As a result, this Annual Report is being submitted under the chapter’s newly-approved name. We expect that all the work needed to fully implement the chapter’s new name will be completed within the first quarter of 2021.

Also at the Annual Business Meeting, we recognized and celebrated the contributions of these outstanding members and volunteers:

**Leaders during COVID**

- Cosmo Catalano
- Brant Cheikes
- Bill Fogel
- Debi Garlick
- Adam Jasionkowski
- Diane Jones
- Kathryn Martin
- Chris Neil
- Janine Papesh
• Jim Pelletier
• Dave Pirog
• Barbara Pitoniak
• Pete Rentz
• Jack Spear
• Laura Stinnette
• Deb Weisenstein
• Heather Wyman

Activity MVPs

• Steve Smith – Appalachian Trail
• Keith Davis – Bicycling
• Kelly Murphy – Family Programs
• Bill Fogel – Mountaineering
• Harry and Susie Sharbaugh – NET stewardship
• Bonna Wieler – Paddling
• Wendy Sinton – Tuesday Hiking

Leader Candidate Training during COVID-19

• Ray Girard – Hiking and trail maintenance leader
• Silvia Scott – Mountaineering
Appie of the Year

Each year the chapter recognizes one of its members for outstanding sustained commitment in service and leadership. The 2020 "Appie of the Year" award was given to Roger Beer.

In conclusion, despite all the challenges we faced in 2020, our chapter persevered and notched many accomplishments to be proud of. Notably, we accomplished all the big things we set out to do: (1) renamed the chapter; (2) helped support the acquisition and development of Hanging Mountain; (3) rebuilt the Paddling Committee; (4) invested significantly in new diversity initiatives and programs.

I am grateful to all the members of the chapter’s all-volunteer Executive Committee, who worked with dedication and persistence to keep the chapter running throughout 2020; to the many volunteer activity leaders, who organized and ran chapter trips and programs before and during the pandemic; to the 2,400+ chapter members who joined our programs and/or stayed in touch; and to AMC’s outstanding professional staff who advised, assisted, supported and sustained us through thick and thin. Thanks to all of you, plus the miracle of multiple highly effective COVID-19 vaccines, I am looking forward to a steady return to near-normal operations in 2021.

Read on for brief reports from the various chapter standing committees highlighting their 2020 accomplishments.

Brant Cheikes
Chapter Chair 2020-2021
Chapter Standing Committee Reports

Below are brief annual reports submitted by the various standing committees of the chapter.

20s/30s Committee

During 2020, the 20s/30s committee remained as active as possible, leading many full and wait-listed hikes across the Connecticut River Valley and Berkshires of Massachusetts; southern Vermont and New Hampshire; and the White Mountains. Through these events, we maintained contact with hikers from both the Western MA chapter and other AMC Chapters. We look forward to welcoming new and returning leaders and members.

Jack Spear
20s/30s Committee Chair
Appalachian Trail (AT) Committee

Headlines:

• 4700 Volunteer hours reported Oct 2019—Oct 2020
• Upper Goose Pond Cabin closed for entire season
• Added tent sites at Race Brook Campsite and October Mountain Campsite
• Repairs to boardwalk/bridges at Hubbard Brook and Hop Brook
• Father Tom Campsite in Cheshire completed
  o Named for a former parish priest at St Mary's Church who for many years hosted A.T. hikers in the parish hall.
  o Opened approximately 1 month later than planned
  o Designed and built by community volunteers
  o Provides tenting, hammocking, potable water, electricity for charging devices, food storage and free bicycles for hikers. Located on town land in the center of Cheshire.
• Clean up from tropical storm Isaias—over 30 downed trees cleared in Massachusetts

Cosmo Catalano
AT Committee Chair
During 2020, the chapter’s Bicycling Committee accomplished the following:

- Four of eight Bicycling trip leaders completed the required COVID-19 safety training
- Seven outdoor bicycle rides were organized this season: 4 in the Berkshires, and 3 in the Connecticut River Valley
- Unlike other bicycling seasons, we had participants from out of state (CT, NY) and from other AMC chapters (including Boston and Worcester)
- We were one of the few AMC Chapters and local bicycle clubs leading rides this season
- The Bicycling Committee Chair became a member of the newly formed group called PV Cycling Advocates, made up of businesses and non-profits in the Pioneer Valley

Janine Papesh
Bicycling Committee Chair
Communications Committee
During the first half of 2020, the Chapter made do without a volunteer to handle its communications needs. The chapter’s website, amcberkshire.org, was minimally maintained. E-mail blasts to chapter members were infrequent. The chapter’s Facebook page saw infrequent posts. In June, a new volunteer contacted us – Leah Brodsky. A recent college graduate in public communication, she was interested in helping the chapter with social media engagement. She took on the job with enthusiasm and talent. She wrote and published numerous short articles of broad member interest, and made sure that our Facebook page was updated several times each week with new content. Towards the end of 2020, yet another new volunteer contacted us – Brad Gawron. Brad is an IT professional with skills in website design, operation and management. He agreed to become the chapter’s webmaster. By the end of 2020, the chapter had the beginnings of a communications team. Still missing was someone to handle e-mail blasts, and possibly to coordinate all chapter communications activities in collaboration with Leah and Brad. But things were looking much better in terms of volunteer capacity to support communications with our members and with the general public.

Brant Cheikes
Acting Communications Chair
Conservation Committee

Great American Outdoors Act and LWCF

The committee was very active in playing a role (probably minor) in the successful campaign to secure passage of the Great American Outdoors Act. This act secured perpetual funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) at $900 million per year. The LWCF is the principal source of federal monies for land acquisition and establishing conservation restrictions. The Act also provided for several billions of dollars to address deferred maintenance on public lands. Our support included messages from chapter chair and committee to US legislators, posting on our website and facebook pages, and coordinating with AMC staff. The conservation committee chair attended a celebration of the efforts of Representative McGovern in securing the passage of permanent authorization and funding of the LWCF. Later in the year we sent messages to our congressmen in support of authorizations for spending the $900 million and lifting administration imposed roadblocks to new land acquisitions.

Solar Power

The state has been promoting solar photovoltaic power for several years. The latest program, SMART, unintentionally resulted in the bulk of these instillations being developed on forest and farm lands. The committee attended hearings, submitted comments, and supplied additional materials to the Department of Energy Resources addressing faults in the program. We photographed a 30+ acre clear-cut and graded
site for a project a solar power project in Conway and sent copies to state legislators. They expressed dismay and requested photos of additional sites.

**State Forests**

Attended several webinars on value of forests for carbon sequestration and climate resilience. Wrote in support of legislation to establish protection for old growth forests on state lands and treating state owned forests as preserves rather than lumber sources.

**Biomass**

Took initial steps to cooperate with AMC staff and others on removing biomass from list of renewable energy projects receiving support from state.

**State Agencies**

Sent messages to legislators in support of funding increases beyond the Governor's budget for Department of Conservation and Recreation and other environmental programs and agencies. The increases were passed and were preserved in an override of a veto.

**River Cleanups**

Participated in cleanups on Connecticut and Westfield Rivers.

**Committee Membership**

Worked with chapter chair on concept of an event or hike to encourage members to join committee or at least support our campaigns. Covid has led to postponement. Chapter Chair successfully recruited new co-chair.

Robert Cherdack
Conservation Committee Chair
Family Programs Committee
Family programs took off to a great start in 2020.

January 2020: Rock Climbing with the Mountaineering Committee. As always, a great turnout with mostly new families connected with climbers. Social with pizza afterwards.

- February 2020: Ice Skating at Amelia Park. Offered for free, with participants paying for rentals, there was a decent turnout of new families and returning. Pizza social and snacks in the side room.
- March: Trampoline park trip cancelled by COVID
- April: Earth Day trail work day cancelled by COVID, etc Etc
- September: Westfield River Cleanup Date with the Westfield Watershed Association
- October: Fly Fishing Clinic with the Westfield Watershed Association
- Last quarter of 2020: Shelter building/campfire day, Winter Hiking Webinar, Indoor Rock Climbing

Heather Wyman
Acting Family Programs Chair
Mountaineering Committee

- Outdoor Climbing Trips organized through mid-March, then halted due to COVID pandemic
- Indoor Rock Climbing programs offered through mid-March, then halted
- Revitalized Ice Climbing Program
- Collaborated with AT Committee on Race Mountain Conservation
- Partnered with Western Massachusetts Climbing Coalition (WMCC) on Hanging Mountain Project
- Developed Recommendations for Climbing During COVID-19
- Led two trail work days during COVID-19
- Led two climbing activities during COVID-19

Chris Neil and Chris Thompson
Mountaineering Committee Co-Chairs
Outings Committee

- Offered 30+ hikes in the Berkshires
- 20 hike leaders led hikes for all levels of hikers, from one mile to 20 miles, in all four seasons
- Three new hike leaders were added
- Tuesday group was still leading hikes thru mid-March, averaging 20 people per hike
- Online hiking adventure webinar by Roger Beer

Kathryn Martin
Outings Committee Chair
During the first quarter of 2020, a new volunteer leadership team was organized to revitalize paddling activities and programs. Together, this team accomplished the following:

- Created an operational plan for chapter paddling activities.
- Defined a chain of trip reviewers and approval.
- Created roles and filled those roles within the chapter’s paddling committee. Roles include Coordinator of trip leader training, treasurer, IPC volunteer, and equipment coordinator, and 3 chairs who rotate attending the ExCom meetings.
- Approved a list of active paddling leaders.
- Created guidelines for Berkshire AMC Paddling (leader in training questionnaire, paddle leader requirements, paddle trip listing requirements).
- Updated the chapter’s website with new paddling-related content.
- Contracted for leadership training on the water with an ACA trainer (postponed due to covid and rescheduled for June 2021).
- Met frequently in the beginning of 2020, then settled into a pattern of monthly meetings.
- Registered for a trip October 24th with 7 participants so far. We also hope to register another trip on Nov 7.

When Covid-19 precautions are lifted, the paddling committee volunteer leadership team will be ready to engage, explore, and inspire others to paddle. We have
earmarked our money to use in training, purchasing used boats and paddles, donations to water and river, and introducing paddling to Western Massachusetts.

Dee Dice, Mary Therese Durr, Bonna Wieler
Paddling Committee Co-Chairs
New England Scenic Trails Committee

In May, Dana Gronbeck stepped down as NET Committee co-chair and recommended that Ray Girard continue as sole committee chair. Ray agreed to take on this role, and was formally elected at the next Executive Committee meeting.

Much of the year was impacted by the coronavirus pandemic. In spite of this major setback, the NET Committee was able to complete many scheduled projects.

- Trail Relocations:
  - Section 5 Rt 202 to Apremont Way
  - Section 15 Lake Wyola
  - Section 16 Gulf Rd Northfield to Mtn Rd Erving

Thanks to a commitment from two of our trail adopters, over 15 miles of the NET were re-blazed. We welcomed three new adopters on Sec 5 and said goodbye to the two who had maintained Sec 5 for many years. We also welcomed a new adopter on Sec 6. With the ongoing help of all our adopters we were able to keep the NET clear of numerous blowdowns this year. We hope to get the paid teen crew back this coming summer as there are several projects for them to do. We also completed our first handicap trail on Sec 1, under the direction of Bridget Likely and Mike Zlogar with support from the PVHC. We also started a StoryCorp Archive Program this year, this is an effort to catalogue the Metacomet-Monadnock Trail from its beginning to the current NET.

Ray Girard
NET Committee Chair
Training and Education Committee
During 2020 the Training and Education Committee accomplished a great deal:

- Online Refresher Training developed for existing activity leaders
- Developed AMC’s Virtual Leadership Training
- Compiled a webpage with COVID-19 Resources for Leaders
- Piloted expanded diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) curriculum
- Kathy Martin contributes Authority of the Resource to AMC’s Environmental Stewardship
- Created Land Acknowledgement Resources for Trip leaders
- Held 2 WFA courses (Jim Helems)

Committee members worked on and contributed to AMC’s activity relaunch rubric, AMC’s Train-the-Trainer for leadership, and AMC’s Badging and Credentialing Committee.

Bill Fogel
Training and Education Chair
### Treasurer’s Report for Calendar Year 2020

#### Financial/Budget Update - 2020

**Status of Accounts:**

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**Totals:** $29,044.00 - $29,805.45 ($761.45)

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* Spec Proj/Grants-Hanging Mountain

**Totals:** $34,044.00 - $23,396.58 ($10,647.42) 68.7%

**Overall Budget Surplus/Deficit:** $6,408.87

**Paddling funds-expenses/balance:** $3,260.00 $6,443.69

**Mountaineering Reserves:** $1,500.00 $841.86
Past Chairs of the Western Massachusetts* Chapter

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<td>1992</td>
<td>Jean Armitage</td>
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<td>1946–47</td>
<td>Carl O Chauncy</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>William Kopel</td>
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<td>1948–49</td>
<td>Harold T Daugherty</td>
<td>1994–95</td>
<td>Thomas J Leary</td>
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<td>1950</td>
<td>Heinz J Sherbow</td>
<td>1996–97</td>
<td>Christopher J Ryan</td>
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<td>1951–52</td>
<td>Ellis H Pritchard</td>
<td>1998–99</td>
<td>Kathryn B Leary</td>
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<td>1953–54</td>
<td>Byron Chauncy</td>
<td>2000–01</td>
<td>Thomas Senuta</td>
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<td>1957–58</td>
<td>John A Saunders</td>
<td>2005–06</td>
<td>Rob Robertson</td>
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<td>1963–64</td>
<td>Edith M Libby</td>
<td>2010–12</td>
<td>Dave Sauriol</td>
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<td>1965–66</td>
<td>Garrison Householder</td>
<td>2012–14</td>
<td>Sabine Prather</td>
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<td>1967–68</td>
<td>Charles L Kirkpatrick</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

2014–15 shared by 4 members of the Executive Committee: Roger Beer, Wayne Rodrigues, Grace Ferrante, Patrick Fletcher

2015 – 17 Jan Alicia Nettler
2017 – 19 Martin Mahoney
2019 – 20 Brant Cheikes

* The Berkshire Chapter was renamed the Western Massachusetts Chapter in late 2020.