

**VERMONT FISH & WILDLIFE  
DEPARTMENT**

**FISHING ACCESS AREA PROGRAM  
2023 MAINTENANCE AND CONSTRUCTION REPORT**

Submitted to:  
Vermont Legislature  
House Committee on Environment and Energy

Submitted by:  
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Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department  
January 18, 2024



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## BACKGROUND

The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department (Department) acquires, maintains, and improves fishing access areas around the state. These areas provide public access to public waters for Vermonters and visitors alike. Fishing access areas are very popular, heavily used, and help connect people to the outdoors. If the Department did not have this program, most members of the public would have to pay for access and would have far fewer opportunities to recreate on public waters to fish, boat, hunt, or trap in Vermont.

The Department maintains these recreational facilities in order to provide easy and safe access to the public waters of Vermont. In calendar year 2023, the Fishing Access Area Program maintained 203 developed fishing access areas on 131 unique waterbodies. Targeted users included 122,131 Vermont licensed anglers, waterfowl hunters, and trappers and approximately 28,000 registered Vermont motorboats that potentially used Department fishing access areas. Additionally, there were tens of thousands of unregistered, non-motorized paddlecraft, and motorboats registered in other states that had the potential to utilize the Department's fishing access areas.

## FUNDING

The Fishing Access Area Program is funded primarily by Vermont motorboat registration fees and Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration funds (SFR) administered by the US Fish and Wildlife Service. The Department received \$420,284 in FY23 from 23 V.S.A. § 3319, which directs 34% of the state's motorboat registration fees to the program. This was nearly a \$21,000 decrease from FY22. These state funds are used to match SFR funds which are generated from a federal excise tax on fishing tackle, boats, motors, and marine fuels. In FY23, the SFR apportionment for Vermont fishing access areas was \$637,025, which was an increase of \$37,500 over last year.

Over the last decade, state and federal funding dedicated to the Fishing Access Area Program has exhibited an increasing trend. While there has been the occasional minor decrease in funding, both funds showed an increase in their 5-year rolling averages. Between FY18 and FY23, the 5-year average for Motorboat Registration fees increased by \$19,900 and SFR funds increased by just over \$69,000. Much of this increase can likely be attributed to the increased outdoor recreational activities individuals took up during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Additional funding over this same time has come in the form of capital funding, averaging \$108,000 annually. Capital funding used in combination with federal aid or motorboat registration funds continues to help the program make considerable gains in addressing the needed ramp repairs and dock improvements, which have enhanced accessibility for all fishing access area users.

In the past 4 years, the Fishing Access Area Program was also the recipient of funding associated with COVID-19. In 2020, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act helped the Department adjust to the dramatic rise in outdoor recreation. The program was able to put over \$850,000 to use by expanding parking areas, improving boat

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ramps, building paddling access sites, and providing additional toilet facilities. Similarly, in 2021, a \$5,000,000 General Fund allocation for outdoor recreational infrastructure further assisted the Agency of Natural Resources with improving recreational facilities. With this allocation, the Fishing Access Area Program benefited from a \$1,450,000 increase in funding for expansion and enhancement of public boating and fishing facilities. The last of these funds were spent early in 2023 to close out a few lingering projects.

## INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS & MAINTENANCE

In calendar year 2023, the Fishing Access Area Program spent \$1,537,284. These expenses were for basic maintenance, staff time, and infrastructure projects, which were paid for with a mix of General, Capital, and Access funds (Table 1). Annual operating expenditures totaled \$1,040,053 and ranged from \$651 for trash disposal fees to over \$358,325 for program administration, including staff time and engineering design for major infrastructure projects. As usual, the bulk of the program's expenditures went to pay for facility operations and maintenance (\$630,430), which included lawn mowing, trash pick-up, parking lot and driveway grading, dock maintenance, snow removal, and portable toilet services. These expenditures resulted in an average annual cost of \$3,106 per fishing access area.

Over the past 5 years, the access program completed 57 infrastructure projects using traditional access program funds as well CARES Act and General and Capital funds totaling \$2,538,328 (Table 2). These projects ranged from installing new paddling access areas to major boat ramp reconstruction. In 2023, five different projects were completed, including four dock projects (Lake Willoughby – Westmore; Marshfield Reservoir – Cabot; Waterbury Dam – Waterbury; Bugbee Landing - Bradford) and one accessible boardwalk that provides fishing and paddling access to Sunset Lake - Benson (Figures 1 & 2). A mixture of General, Capital, and Access funds paid for the 2023 infrastructure projects and total expenditures were \$497,231. There were also several projects being developed that take significant time to design and permit. Four of these projects will provide critical access improvements to Lake Champlain: Colchester Point (Winooski River) - Colchester; Larabees Point – Shoreham; Van Everest – Milton; Fort Cassin (Otter Creek) – Ferrisburg).

One of the most significant operational changes over the past few years has been the loss of the Department of Corrections Community Work Crew Program (DOC). The DOC program provided regular maintenance services (trash pick-up, grass mowing, sign maintenance, etc.) to over 95% of the access areas for the past 25+ years. In the spring of 2020 the crews were suspended due to COVID-19 and were permanently disbanded at the end of 2022. This has required the Department to make a significant shift in how it completes its weekly maintenance activities. Private contractors were hired, the frequency of mowing and trash removal visits were scaled back, and overall maintenance responsibilities were modified. For the 5 years leading up to the pandemic, the Department's average grounds maintenance expenditures were \$71,775/year, of which \$63,795 was paid to the DOC program. In 2023, the private contractor's providing a reduced level of maintenance services cost the Department \$168,886. The Department will be evaluating different cost saving measures in the coming years to ensure this service does not continue to take up such a large fraction of the annual budget.

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## ACCESSIBILITY TRANSITION PLAN

To comply with 2010 American with Disabilities Act Standards for Accessible Design (ADA Standards), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and Vermont's Public Accommodation law (9 V.S.A. Chapter 139), the Department recently finalized an accessibility transition plan. The primary purpose of the Fishing Access Area Program is to provide access to public waters for the purposes of fishing, boating, hunting, and trapping, which all members of the public have the right to access for these opportunities. This plan is intended to help guide the Department's efforts to enhance accessibility at fishing access areas across the state.

This work began with a self-evaluation of all facilities intended to record their status relative to compliance with the ADA Standards. Facilities being evaluated included all potentially accessible features, such as parking, and routes from parking to boating and/or fishing infrastructure (docks, ramps, and fishing platforms). Upon completion of the evaluation, the Department drafted a plan for maintaining those sites that are currently accessible as well as a road map for future improvements. The plan that was developed will also inform users of accessible facilities and identify a process for enhancing accessibility over the next 5 years.

Just over 22% of the 203 fishing access areas are fully accessible as of the end 2023. The Department will work to increase the number of compliant facilities to at least 50% by 2028 (Table 3). All planned infrastructure improvements are dependent on available funding, but implementing this plan is a priority for the program. While opportunistic accessibility improvements will continue to occur, with this plan the Department will shift to a more systematic approach for enhancing accessibility around the state. Over the next 5 years the Department will strive to achieve the below goals:

- Goal 1: Provide equitable access to a diversity of facilities (shore fishing platforms, docks, and ramps) where each facility type is no more than 25 miles from any point in Vermont;
- Goal 2: 50% of all facilities will be fully compliant with the Standards;
- Goal 3: 90% of all SFP facilities will be compliant with the Standards;
- Goal 4: 70% of all dock facilities will be compliant with the Standards;

## JULY FLOODING

The Department's fishing access areas are, by their very nature, connected to water. With the increase in storm intensity due to the effects of climate change, these Department facilities are always at risk of being damaged. That said, many of the access areas suffered only minor damage relative to many of our downtowns. Eleven fishing access areas suffered damage and only 3 sustained major damage, including Seymour Lake (Morgan), Gale Meadows Dam (South Londonderry), and Rood Pond (Williamstown) (Figure 3).

The Department has been working with FEMA since August to document and restore damaged facilities. This process is slow, but many of the sites with minor damage have already been restored and have been re-opened. Vermont Agency of Transportation provided assistance in helping to repair parking areas and driveways quickly. The Department will work to execute contracts for repair work for the remaining, more significantly damaged access areas. When all

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11 sites are restored to pre-flood conditions, the total repairs costs will exceed \$1,000,000. It has yet to be determined if FEMA will be assisting with a 25% or a 10% cost share. Regardless, the federal funding assistance is critically important to facilitate restoration of the damaged facilities.

#### LAND ACQUISITION

The Department secured the acquisition of a new fishing access area on the 85-acres Halls Lake in Newbury, which is popular for year-round fishing as well as boating during the open water season. This acquisition was a donation from Jewell Dube and David Whitman. The property had functioned as an informal public boat ramp for decades, but the landowners wanted to preserve public access in perpetuity. The 0.75-acre parcel already contained a small gravel boat ramp, and a 10-car parking lot on the opposite side of a public road so there were no immediate development costs required.

#### CONTACTS

Any questions or comments regarding the Fishing Access Area Program should be directed to:  
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Table 1. Summary of all expenditures for Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department’s Fishing Access Area Program, 2023. *See Table 2 for a more detailed breakdown of infrastructure improvements.*

<b>PROJECT DESCRIPTION</b>	<b>AMOUNT</b>
<b>INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS</b>	
<i>Access Area Program funded</i>	\$ 98,555.83
<i>Capital funded</i>	\$ 140,275.06
<i>General funded</i>	\$ 258,400.00
<b>OPERATING EXPENSES</b>	
<i>Site Work Maintenance (i.e. gravel, grading, excavation)</i>	\$ 177,699.57
<i>Dock Maintenance</i>	\$ 50,563.58
<i>Weekly Grounds Maintenance</i>	\$ 168,885.55
<i>Portable Toilet Rentals</i>	\$ 95,396.82
<i>Snow Removal</i>	\$ 62,899.00
<i>Land Acquisition</i>	\$ 8,914.29
<i>Purchase of building materials, supplies, equipment rentals, etc.</i>	\$ 7,457.98
<i>Payments for Public Access on Private Lands (i.e., leases)</i>	\$ 1,550.00
<i>PILOT (payments in lieu of taxes) or Taxes</i>	\$ 43,088.45
<i>Engineering &amp; staff time – design, construction, &amp; program admin</i>	\$ 358,325.21
<i>Historic Preservation/Archaeology Consultation</i>	\$ 36,090.21
<i>Signage</i>	\$ 5,539.02
<i>Clean Water fees</i>	\$ 3,321.24
<i>Utilities</i>	\$ 5,601.06
<i>Permitting</i>	\$ 2,231.90
<i>Colchester Police Department (traffic control)</i>	\$ 1,890.00
<i>Trash Disposal</i>	\$ 651.10
<i>Lake Rescue litigation</i>	\$ 6,295.30
<i>Miscellaneous Administrative Expenses (gas, IT, etc.)</i>	\$ 3,652.33
<b>TOTAL FISHING ACCESS AREA EXPENDITURES</b>	<b>\$ 1,537,283.50</b>

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Table 2. List of fishing access areas infrastructure projects from 2019 through 2023. Projects were funded with either state motorboat registration, capital funds, or general funds and often cost-shared with Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration funding. ADA = Americans with Disabilities Act.

2019	Chittenden Res.**	New ADA dock (60 ft)	\$	12,514.96
	Kehoe**	New ADA dock (north ramp) (50 ft)	\$	13,818.06
	Larry Greene**	New 20 ft dock extension	\$	8,932.61
	Lake Rescue*	New ADA dock (50 ft)	\$	7,778.11
	Seymour Lake	Water quality project	\$	2,029.52
<b>2019 TOTAL</b>			<b>\$</b>	<b>45,073.26</b>
2020	Curtis Pond	New ADA low profile dock (40 x 8 ft)	\$	27,122.54
	Bristol Pond	New ADA low profile dock (36 x 8 ft)	\$	23,624.29
	Harvey's Lake	New ADA dock (44 ft)	\$	26,331.17
	Shelburne Pond**	New ADA dock (48 ft) – dock was originally purchased for Lake Rescue	\$	4,748.25
	Dummerston	New ramp on Connecticut River & ADA parking	\$	111,390.00
	St. Albans Bay	Repave and restripe the existing parking lot to increase parking & traffic flow	\$	98,667.00
	Allen Point	Road improvements (\$98,330.58) & gangway to ADA fishing platform (\$34,412)	\$	132,742.58
	Keeler Bay	Parking lot expansion	\$	52,408.68
	Horicans	Parking lot expansion	\$	71,632.78
	Curtis Pond	Ramp dredging to improve boater access	\$	3,500.23
	Kings Bay	Ramp dredging to improve boater access	\$	43,882.94
	Larry Greene	Ramp dredging to improve boater access	\$	13,201.26
	Malletts Bay	Replace and enhance dock anchoring systems for 2 docks	\$	52,541.00
	NEK Access Projects	Enhanced access to rivers and streams for paddling and fishing (9 sites)	\$	97,823.22
	Hoyt's Landing	Repave and restripe the existing parking lot to increase parking & traffic flow	\$	51,853.38
	Dummerston	Enhance access road by adding gravel & crowning road; cut back brush & trees	\$	20,520.00
	South Stream	Enhance access road by adding replacing failing culverts, adding gravel & crowning road; cut back brush & trees	\$	11,705.85
	Lamoille River	Enhance the road by adding gravel & crowning road	\$	4,884.00
	Van Everest	Enhance the road by adding gravel & crowning road	\$	4,375.20
<b>2020 TOTAL</b>			<b>\$</b>	<b>852,954.37</b>

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2021	Winooski River Streambank	Constructed stairs to aid in paddler access	\$ 920.04
	Marshfield Reservoir	Ramp dredging (construction oversight only; GMP funded)	\$ 5,498.72
	Malletts Bay	Dock refurbishment	\$ 47,247.60
	Great Averill	Ramp reconstruction	\$ 36,761.03
	North Thetford	Ramp reconstruction	\$ 46,207.11
	Colchester Pt	Ramp dredging	\$ 53,824.75
	Fort Cassin	Permitting & archaeology work	\$ 46,413.00
		<b>2021 TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 236,872.25</b>
2022	Sunset Lake***	Parking area & boardwalk construction	\$ 7,501.00
	Colchester Point	Ramp redesign – engineering only	\$ 26,087.10
	Moose River Access	Constructed paddling access at 4 separate parcels (3 sites within Victory Bog WMA & one on Moose River Access)	\$ 52,962.82
	Otter Creek Access***	Constructed paddling access at 4 separate parcels (Nielson Parcel & at the primary WMA, Kingsley, and Middlebury Access)	\$ 71,415.62
	Joes Pond	Ramp reconstruction	\$ 162,340.00
	Marshfield Reservoir	Ramp extension & creation of fish habitat (50% cost share with Forests, Parks, & Recreation)	\$ 63,782.45
	Hoyts Landing***	Ramp dredging (2 ramps)	\$ 224,300.00
	Rock River***	Construction of a concrete ramp	\$ 1,628.00
	Ft Cassin	Design & archaeology work	\$ 22,928.86
	Lake Fairlee	Ramp reconstruction and ADA parking	\$ 98,199.96
	Statewide	Site work, general access area maintenance	\$ 175,051.41
		<b>2022 TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 906,197.22</b>

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2023	Sunset Lake	Parking area & boardwalk construction	\$ 154,838.67
	Colchester Point*	Ramp redesign – engineering only	\$ 4,936.50
	Hoyts Landing**	Ramp dredging (2 ramps)	\$ 20,500.00
	Rock River**	Construction of a concrete ramp	\$ 100,918.40
	Moose River Access**	Constructed paddling access at 4 separate parcels (3 sites within Victory Bog WMA & one on Moose River Access)	\$ 11,627.76
	Otter Creek Access***	Constructed paddling access at 4 separate parcels (Nielson Parcel & at the primary WMA, Kingsley, and Middlebury Access)	\$ 19,959.50
	Tabor Point*	Ramp extension	\$ 32,925.00
	Bugbee Landing	Grant to town of Bradford for new ADA dock	\$ 11,500.00
	Lake Willoughby	New ADA dock (50 ft) with 24 ft approach	\$ 59,389.26
	Marshfield Reservoir	New ADA dock (54 ft) with 26 ft approach	\$ 57,359.26
	Waterbury Reservoir	New ADA dock	\$ 23,526.54
<b>2023 TOTAL</b>			<b>\$ 497,230.89</b>

\*Denotes only partial payment for work that was fully completed the following calendar year.

\*\*Denotes project completion in previous year, but payments not made until current calendar year.

\*\*\*Project completed in current year, but full payments will not be reflected until following calendar year.

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Table 3 – The Department’s plan for enhancing accessibility with a goal of making 50% of its facilities compliant by the end of 2028. At the end of 2023, 30 of the Department’s 215 facilities at 203 different FAAs were fully compliant with the Standards. (Table 2 from VT Fish & Wildlife Department – Accessibility Transition Plan for Fishing Access Areas.)

Year	Total Compliant Facilities (at year’s end)	Cumulative Total	Cumulative Total Percent Compliant	Targeted # of Improved Facilities – Annually			
				SFP	Dock	Ramp	Parking
2023	48	48	22.3	6	18	16	8
2024	16	64	29.8	2	4	10	0
2025	24	89	41.4	5	5	11	3
2026	10	99	46.0	4	1	4	1
2027	12	110	51.2	2	0	8	2
2028	5	115	53.5	0	0	3	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>53.5</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>16</b>

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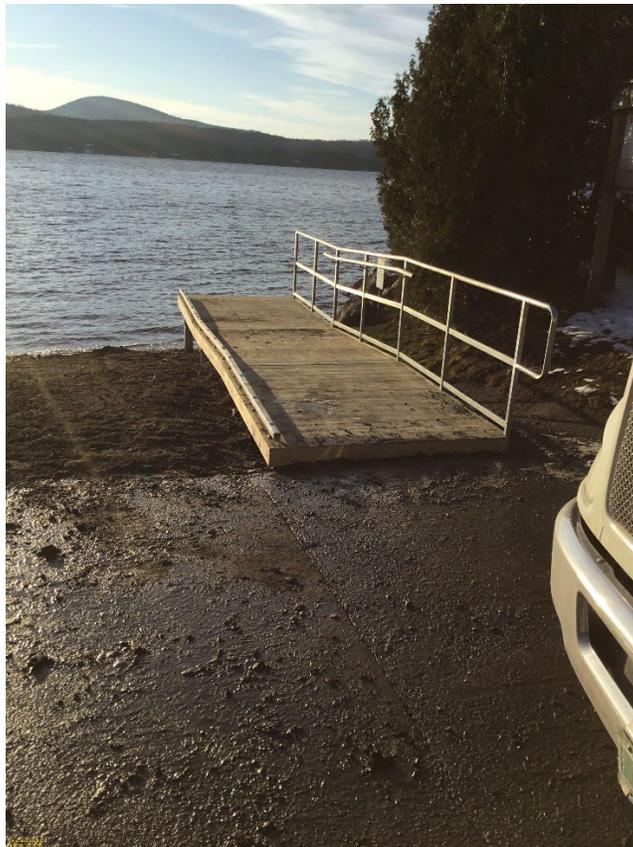


Figure 1. New accessible dock abutments were installed at the Marshfield Reservoir Access Area/Mollys Falls State Park in Cabot (top) and Lake Willoughby Access Area in Westmore (bottom) this past November. Both docks will be fully accessible and enhance boating access to these popular waterbodies.

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Figure 2. Sunset Lake (Benson) – This boardwalk is part of a newly constructed ADA accessible access area that was constructed on the north side of Sunset Lake. The project included significant upgrades to a camp road that leads to a new parking area which will serve both the fishing access area and Pond Woods Wildlife Management Area. From the parking area, there is a short gravel trail which leads to the boardwalk and lake shore where anglers and paddlers can access the lake.

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Figure 3. Storm damaged facilities – Gale Meadows Dam (top) suffered a significant washout as water overtopped the auxiliary spillway and eroded much of the large boulders. Rood Pond's (bottom) access road was washed out due to an undersized culvert under a town road. Debris was deposited on the boat ramp and in adjacent areas in the pond.