



Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department Land Conservation and Management Annual Report – 2023

The Mission of the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department is to **Protect and Conserve** our **Fish, Wildlife, Plants** and their **Habitats** for the **People of Vermont**.

Otter Creek WMA - photo credit: Ember Photography, courtesy of Trust for Public Land

The July 2023 flood events ravaged many areas of Vermont. Fortunately, most of the department's Wildlife Management Areas (WMA) and Streambank Management Areas (SMA) escaped significant damage.

Using funding from the federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), and a state capital appropriation (H.315), large-scale infrastructure projects were completed on three WMAs in 2023. Substantial road upgrades were completed at Bill Sladyk WMA, a wildlife viewing tower was constructed at Dead Creek WMA, and significant access improvements were completed at the Lemon Fair WMA.

...for the People of Vermont.

Maintaining facilities and infrastructure such as roads, bridges, and signs is essential to achieve the habitat management and public use goals of VFWD lands. The following activities were conducted to improve the public's experience when visiting the properties:

SIGNAGE

- ◆ Improved or installed **36** information kiosks.
- ◆ Installed **2** WMA entrance signs.

FACILITIES

- ◆ Maintained or removed **11** buildings.
- ◆ Installed **3** new parking areas.
- ◆ Maintained **43** existing parking areas.

PLANNING

- ◆ **17** articles published and/or public events hosted.
- ◆ **12** site inspections performed for land acquisitions.

ACCESS

- ◆ **6** mile of trails were maintained.
- ◆ **37** miles of roads were maintained.
- ◆ **25** culverts and bridges were installed.
- ◆ **21** gates were installed or maintained.

Protect and Conserve...

The following activities were conducted to protect and conserve these valuable properties:

- ◆ **227** acres of invasive plants were managed to control their impact on wildlife habitat.
- ◆ **9.5** miles of boundary lines were maintained.
- ◆ **6** beaver baffle water control devices were installed to protect wetland habitats.
- ◆ **21** gates were installed or maintained.

our Fish, Wildlife, Plants...

- ◆ **34** inventories of wildlife, fish, plants and natural communities were conducted on WMAs by Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department (VFWD) staff.

and their Habitats...

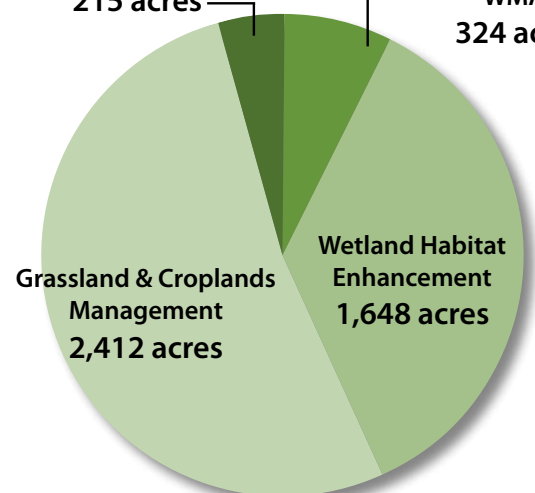
The following activities were conducted to enhance wildlife habitat on VFWD lands statewide:

- ◆ **28** dams were maintained to manage the associated wetland acres.
- ◆ **460** nesting boxes for ducks were maintained.
- ◆ **1,648** acres of wetlands were managed to enhance wildlife habitat.

4,599 Acres of Habitat Managed

Old Field & Shrubs Mowing/Burning
215 acres

Timber Harvested on
WMAs
324 acres





LAND ACQUISITION

VFWD completed three land acquisition projects in 2023 resulting in the addition of 488 acres of unique fish and wildlife habitat to public ownership. The following projects were completed this past year:

- ◆ **New WMA in Troy Vermont:** Addition of 72 acres along the Upper Missisquoi River upstream from the Town of Troy, acquired from the town and the Lazor Family. Funded with money from the Lake Champlain Basin Program and the US EPA, the department acquired these former hay fields to restore to their original wetland state. The restored wetlands will improve water quality and flood water storage capacity, provide public access and create wildlife habitat. Although Big Falls State Park is nearby, there is no WMA or other public access for hunting in this area. The new WMA will provide access where it is sorely needed.
- ◆ **Vermont Gas Mitigation Parcel:** VDFW acquired 61 acres in Colchester as a mitigation parcel associated with the construction of the Addison Natural Gas Project. VDFW and Vermont Gas worked closely to avoid undue adverse impacts to these natural environments. Because of some unavoidable impacts to the natural environment, this parcel was offered for mitigation. The property is mostly forested with rare Pine-Oak-Heath Sandplain Forest and a large Class II wetland.
- ◆ **Expansion of Otter Creek WMA:** VDFW added 355 acres to Otter Creek WMA in Wallingford to enhance public access, wildlife habitat and flood water storage along the Otter Creek. Featuring 1.25 miles on both sides of the river, this

acquisition upstream from Wallingford village links the critical Vermont Valley floor with the Taconic Mountains to the West and the Green Mountains to the east. The property features uplands, wetlands, riparian areas, with productive wildlife viewing and hunting grounds. VDFW worked with the Trust for Public Land, the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, Vermont Rivers Conservancy, the USFWS and the US Forest Service to realize this important addition.



New WMA in Troy

HABITAT STAMP

Your Vermont Habitat Stamp contributes directly to conserving and improving VFWD lands. In May 2023, VFWD completed an expansion of Otter Creek WMA in Wallingford. The expansion added 355 acres to the WMA, including 107 acres of wetlands, 100 acres of floodplain, and 1.25 miles along the Otter Creek. Get your stamp today at vtfishandwildlife.com/vthabitatstamp.



Wildlife Habitat Timber Harvests on Department Lands State Fiscal Years 2019-2023						
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	5 YEAR TOTALS
Fee acres harvested	204	189	412	877	324	2,006
Board Feet (MBF)	817	483	911	1,985	552	4,748
Cords	994	712	3,081	9,604	3,639	18,030
Non-fee acres harvested*	150	275	290	0	0	715
# Active Timber Harvests	7	6	2	6	3	N/A

*Non-fee acres refers to lands owned by the department where we do not own the timber rights.

PROGRAM PARTNERS

Most of the projects described in this report are funded through the Federal Aid in Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program. Excise taxes paid by hunters and anglers on firearms, ammunition, archery, and fishing equipment, coupled with state hunting and fishing license fees, have helped the department acquire land, and restore and manage fish and wildlife since 1937.

Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation, Wildlife Management Institute, Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation, The Vermont Chapter of The Nature Conservancy, National Wild Turkey Federation, and Audubon Vermont further supported habitat improvements on VFWD lands in 2023.

