

**VERMONT FISH & WILDLIFE
DEPARTMENT**

**FISHING ACCESS AREA PROGRAM
2020 MAINTENANCE AND CONSTRUCTION REPORT**

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Vermont Legislative Committee
House Natural Resources, Fish, and Wildlife

Submitted by:
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BACKGROUND

The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department (Department) acquires, maintains and manages a large number of 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 areas in order to provide reasonable and safe access to the public waters of Vermont. In calendar year 2020, the Fishing Access Area Program maintained 196 developed fishing access areas on 130 unique waterbodies. Targeted user groups are anglers, recreational boaters, waterfowl hunters, and trappers. In 2020, there were 136,006 licensed anglers, waterfowl hunters, and trappers and approximately 27,300 registered Vermont motorboats that potentially used Department Fishing Access Areas, along with the tens of thousands of unregistered non-motorized paddlecraft and motorboats registered in other states.

FUNDING

The Fishing Access Area Program is funded primarily by Vermont motorboat registration fees and Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration funds (SFR). The Department received \$430,001 in FY20 from motorboat registration fees per 23 V.S.A. § 3319, which directs 34% of the fees to the Fishing Access Area Program. This was nearly a \$32,000 increase over FY19. 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 FY20, the SFR apportionment for Vermont fishing access areas was \$554,588, which is a decrease of \$1,008 from last year.

Over the last decade, state and federal funding for the access program began with a strong downward trend, but have rebounded recently. Between 2011-15 the program saw an average annual decrease in funding of nearly \$36,000. This downward trend hit a low in 2015 with a total of \$842,700 in state and federal funding. Over the last 5 years (2016-2020) that trend has flipped and the program has experienced an average annual increase of \$24,400. This upward trend hit a 5-year high in FY20 with a total of \$984,589 in state and federal funding.

While state and federal revenues remain slightly lower today than 10 years ago, this decrease has been offset by a strong and consistent capital appropriation. Over this same time capital funding averaged \$136,300. In FY20, the program received a \$100,000 appropriation. Capital funds have been used in combination with federal aid and motorboat registration funds to make considerable gains in addressing the backlog of needed ramp repairs and dock installations, which have improved accessibility for all fishing access area users.

COVID-19 & CARES ACT

In addition to the traditional annual funding that comes to the fishing access program, the legislature allocated funds from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES)

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Act to assist the Department in 2020. This allocation was intended to help the public get outdoors and participate in recreational activities in a safe and healthy manner. The additional funding made approximately \$1,000,000 available to the access program budget, which targeted infrastructure projects and additional site services to help reduce potential community spread of COVID-19.

Due to the pandemic, this past year was clearly different for the access program in terms of funding, the level of use by the public, and services provided. The guidance for households to socially distance from others created a significant demand by the public to get outside and recreate. Since many indoor activities were not available or discouraged, and travel was restricted, Vermonters headed outside to boat, hunt, fish, hike, bike, and camp. This was not unique to Vermont as public lands across the country saw a significant increase in visitors throughout the year. This increased demand is highlighted by the record number of Vermont hunting and fishing licenses sold in 2020. Fishing license sales increased 18% (16,423 licenses) over last year.

Temporary shutdowns of businesses impacted numerous access program services throughout the year. Initially, contractors were not allowed to work and once they could, there was a significant backlog of work to be completed. Additionally, once businesses were allowed to return to work, prohibitions on the number of individuals working together made work crews smaller, which further delayed typical spring work from being completed. Interruptions were seen in deploying portable toilets, installing courtesy docks, and completing site work.

The Department of Corrections Probation and Parole (DOC) program, which usually provides weekly maintenance services (trash pick-up, grass mowing, sign maintenance, etc.) to over 95% of the access areas, was suspended in 2020. This DOC program provides a critical service to the Department. Without any reliable weekly maintenance, the access program enlisted Department staff to help pick up trash at roughly half of the fishing access areas. This cost was over \$42,000, which is about half of what is paid to the DOC crews. However, the number of sites maintained and the level of maintenance that staff could provide resulted in a substantially lower quality of services. Utilizing Department staff was a stop-gap measure and alternatives will have to be explored for 2021 if DOC maintenance crews are once again not available.

MAINTENANCE & INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS

In calendar year 2020, the Fishing Access Area Program spent \$1,697,500.23. These expenses were for basic maintenance, capital improvements, and infrastructure projects, including CARES Act funded projects (Table 1). Traditional program expenditures (non-CARES Act) totaled \$845,762.21 and ranged from \$426 for trash disposal fees to over \$292,000 for program administration, including engineering design and construction oversight. As usual, the bulk of the program's expenditures went to pay for facility operations and maintenance (\$359,150), which included lawn mowing, trash pick-up, parking lot and driveway grading, dock maintenance, snow removal, and portable toilet services. This is an average annual cost of \$1,832 per fishing access area.

Over the past 5 years, the access program completed 47 infrastructure projects using traditional

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access program funds totaling \$1,073,419.85 (Table 2). These projects range from installing new stormwater infrastructure to major boat ramp construction. In 2020, 5 different projects were completed, including 4 new courtesy docks (Bristol Pond – Monkton; Curtis Pond – Calais; Harveys Lake – Barnet; Shelburne Pond – Shelburne) and the construction of one new ramp (Dummerston Fishing Access Area – Connecticut River, Dummerston) (Figures 1 & 2). Capital funding paid for the 4 docks and has significantly increased the program's ability to complete projects around the state. Since 2012, 79 different infrastructure projects were complete at 68 different access areas around the state. The Dummerston ramp construction was paid for using state motorboat registration funds.

The access program made the most of the CARES funding allocation by completing over 20 new projects in just over 3 months. The total expenditures exceeded \$850,000 (Table 3). The single largest expenditure was \$190,000, which paid for the additional portable toilet services across the state. These expenses were above and beyond the normal level of service provided to the public. Some units were cleaned once per day, but most were cleaned on Fridays and Mondays to reduce COVID exposure risk on the weekends when access areas are more heavily used. Daily cleanings were generally not available as most companies did not have the staffing or equipment to provide that level of service.

Another \$659,000 was spent on infrastructure projects meant to enhance outdoor recreational opportunities and allow people to safely recreate outdoors. This included 3 ramp improvements, 1 dock and fishing platform renovation each, 9 parking improvements, and 9 non-motorized (i.e. canoe and kayak) access improvements (Figure 3). The majority of these projects took place in parts of northern Lake Champlain or in the Northeast Kingdom, which contain the largest number and often the busiest fishing access areas in the state.

FUTURE PROJECTS

With a limited number of construction projects completed in 2020, the access program is going to focus on project surveying, design, and permitting for construction in 2021 or 2022. While there were some significant delays due to the pandemic and working on completing the CARES funded projects, the Department was still able to complete a number of in-water surveys this fall. These surveys serve as a baseline data source for development of ramp and dock projects.

The Department also uses survey data to better inform ourselves and the public. Boaters frequently call the Department regarding shallow lake depths, which often coincide with dry summers. Surveys allow the Department to obtain an accurate assessment of the in-water conditions, including water depths well beyond the ramp area. This information can then help staff determine if modifications such as dredging are required, and develop cost estimates, if warranted.

The top priority for 2021 is the redesign the Colchester Point Fishing Access Area on the Winooski River. This site is a key access to Lake Champlain and the Winooski River and is one of the most popular fishing spots in the state from ice-out through mid-July, for both anglers and boaters, especially during the walleye season. Unfortunately, this fishing access area was designed in a way that creates high sediment deposits directly on the ramp, making it

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unusable once water levels drop in mid-summer (Figure 4). The Department has been working with the engineering firm Milone and MacBroom, Inc., which has provided a preliminary design and path forward. If the Department pursues modifying this access, it will likely cost close to \$400,000 for final design and construction, but will make this popular access useable through the entire boating season.

Final designs and permitting will be obtained late winter/early spring 2021 for a similar project at the Fort Cassin Fishing Access Area in Ferrisburg. This access is located near the mouth of the Otter Creek and proposed ramp modifications will yield better water depths for boaters, anglers, and waterfowl hunters during the late summer and early fall months. No cost estimate has been developed yet for this project.

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, 2020. *See Table 3 for a more detailed breakdown of infrastructure improvements.*

PROJECT DESCRIPTION	AMOUNT
Major Construction Project – Dummerston Access Area	\$ 111,390.00
Capital Funded Infrastructure Improvements	\$ 81,826.25
Site Work Maintenance (i.e. gravel, grading, excavation)	\$ 124,767.80
Dock Maintenance	\$ 33,277.24
Weekly Grounds Maintenance	
Department of Corrections Community Restitution Crews	\$ 5,270.52
Lawn and Maintenance Services (Not DOC)	\$ 3,645.00
F&W Department Staff time - no DOC crews due to COVID	\$ 42,467.36
Portable Toilet Rentals	\$ 73,008.34
Snow Removal	\$ 46,250.00
Purchase of building materials, supplies, equipment rentals, etc.	\$ 10,303.17
Payments for Public Access on Private Lands (i.e. leases)	\$ 2,642.00
Engineering & staff time – admin, design, & construction	\$ 292,526.55
Signage	\$ 1,855.25
Clean Water fees	\$ 4,451.63
Utilities	\$ 5,354.10
Permitting	\$ 4,028.96
Trash Disposal	\$ 425.95
Professional Memberships & Meetings	\$ 870.94
Miscellaneous Administrative Expenses (gas, IT, etc.)	\$ 1,401.15
CARES Act Expenses (see table 2)	
Infrastructure Project	\$ 659,738.12
Portable Toilets - additional units & cleanings (COVID)	\$ 190,725.00
Trash Disposal - additional charges due to COVID	\$ 1,275.00
TOTAL FISHING ACCESS AREA EXPENDITURES	\$1,697,500.33

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Table 2. List of fishing access areas infrastructure projects from 2016 through 2020. Projects were funded with either state motorboat registration or capital funds, and often cost-shared with Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration funding. ADA = Americans with Disabilities Act.

	SITE	PROJECT DESCRIPTION	COST
2016	Valley Lake	Dredged gravel ramp (2014); concrete cloth ramp install	\$ 8,860.00
	Benson Landing	Ramp extension	\$ 14,143.09
	Fisher Bridge	Built an ADA walkway to fishing platform	\$ 772.72
	Putney Landing	Ramp reconstruction	\$ 33,438.57
	South Bay	Ramp removal & new ADA dock w/ fishing platform (50 ft)	\$ 5,273.03
	Converse Bay	Ramp extension & ADA parking	\$ 134,529.23
		2016 TOTAL	\$ 197,016.64
2017	Dillenbeck Bay	Constructed new concrete boat ramp where gravel ramp previously existed	\$ 51,500.00
	Shelburne Pond	Constructed new concrete boat ramp where gravel ramp previously existed	\$ 45,959.19
	Benson Landing	New ADA dock (60 ft)	\$ 47,184.85
	Crystal Lake*	Relocated ADA dock from Larabee's Pt (50 ft)	\$ 16,563.14
	Island Pond	Relocated dock from Magoon Access (Lake Dunmore) (50 ft)	\$ 2,082.50
	Lake St. Catherine	New ADA dock (50 ft)	\$ 27,559.18
	Larabee's Point	New ADA dock (70 ft)	\$ 50,354.60
	Magoon	New ADA dock (50 ft)	\$ 28,013.43
	Seymour Lake	New ADA dock (50 ft)	\$ 30,079.93
	South Bay	New ADA with fishing platform (50 ft)	\$ 35,123.09
	Whipple Point	New ADA dock (60 ft)	\$ 30,160.89
		2017 TOTAL	\$ 364,580.80
2018	Chittenden Reservoir*	New ADA dock (50 ft)	\$ 19,068.53
	Kehoe*	New ADA dock (50 ft)	\$ 16,575.51
	Lake Fairlee	New ADA dock (50 ft)	\$ 28,502.26
	Lake Morey*	New ADA dock (50 ft)	\$ 26,025.01
	Lake Rescue*	New ADA dock (50 ft)	\$ 15,791.90
	Larry Greene*	New 20 ft dock extension	\$ 8,319.39
	Norton Pond	New ADA dock (50 ft)	\$ 26,982.53
	Crystal Lake**	New concrete dock abutment to make fully ADA	\$ 11,549.30
	Evanoika	ADA parking & path to dock	\$ 10,923.95
	Kehoe	ADA parking & path to dock	\$ 7,954.25
	Lake St. Catherine	ADA parking & path to dock	\$ 16,460.55

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	Magoon	ADA parking & path to dock	\$ 8,020.00
	Larabee's Point	ADA parking & path to dock	\$ 7,216.00
	Chimney Point	ADA parking & path to dock	\$ 9,610.00
	Marshfield Reservoir	ADA parking & path to dock	\$ 11,500.00
	Whipple Point	ADA parking & path to dock	\$ 6,049.50
	South Bay	ADA parking & path to dock	\$ 5,148.74
	Seymour Lake	ADA parking & path to dock	\$ 2,246.75
	Big Salem Lake	ADA parking & path to dock	\$ 4,551.75
	Berlin Pond	New parking & carry-on access	\$ 25,590.00
	Wenlock WMA	Constructed new paddling access	\$ 1,860.33
	Clyde River	Constructed stairs to aid in paddler access	\$ 1,860.33
	Rotary Access	Constructed stairs to aid in paddler access	\$ 1,726.32
		2018 TOTAL	\$ 273,532.90
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
		2019 TOTAL	\$ 45,073.26
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
		2020 TOTAL	\$ 193,216.25
		5 YEAR TOTAL	\$ 1,073,419.85

*Denotes only partial payment for a dock had not yet been installed.

**Denotes final payment and installation charges for a dock.

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Table 3. List of fishing access area expenses funded by the CARES Act, March-December, 2020.

SITE	PROJECT DESCRIPTION	COST
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
Horican's	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
VanEverest	Enhance the road by adding gravel & crowning road	\$ 4,375.20
	TOTAL	\$ 659,738.12
Portable Toilets	Additional units and/or cleanings were provided to reduce the potential exposure risk to access area users.	\$ 190,725.00
Trash Removal	The lack of regular access area maintenance resulted in accumulated trash and the occasional contractor dumping their debris, which needed proper disposal.	\$ 1,275.00
	TOTAL	\$ 192,000.00

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Figure 1. Newly installed low-profile docks at the Curtis Pond (top image) and Bristol Pond (lower image) Fishing Access Area in Calais and Bristol, VT. Low profile docks provide improved access for both motorboats and paddlecraft.

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Figure 2. A new ramp (top image) was constructed this past summer at the Dummerston Access Area on the Connecticut River in Dummerston, VT. The old ramp (bottom image) was located in a small back water that had been completely filled with silt and was no longer usable.

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Figure 3. The above image and next two images are of completed CARES Act funded projects at fishing access areas from around the state.

Above: Allen Point (South Hero) – A new gangway to a fishing platform at the southern end of the causeway on Lake Champlain. The gangway makes this platform fully ADA accessible to the public.

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Malletts Bay (Colchester) – New anchoring systems were installed on the two docks at the Department’s largest and busiest fishing access area. These modifications will increase the docks’ longevity by preventing them from sitting on the lake bottom during low water. They are also now free floating regardless of water level, making them safer and usable to all boaters. Both docks will be fully ADA accessible with the addition of paved approaches, to be installed next spring.

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Kings Bay (Alburgh) – Three different ramps were dredged (Kings Bay, Larry Greene (Swanton), & Curtis Pond (Calais) to remove accumulated silt and make them more accessible to all boats. Prior to this work, these ramps were only usable during high water or by small boats during low water levels.

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Figure 4. Severe siltation issues on the Colchester Point Fishing Access Area ramp on the Winooski River in Colchester Point.