

2023 Vermont Habitat Stamp Annual Report



Otter Creek Wildlife Management Area

photo courtesy Trust for Public Land - ©Brian Mohr

In *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Robin Wall Kimmerer writes, “We spill over into the world and the world spills over into us.” The work done through the Vermont Habitat Stamp is a clear example of this.

The work funded through Vermont Habitat Stamp donations not only improves habitat for Vermont’s fish and wildlife species, but it also benefits the lives of the people who live here. Each year, Vermont Habitat Stamp donations help protect and strengthen traffic infrastructure, improve water quality, increase our communities’ climate resilience, conserve the scenic beauty of our state, and provide public access to places for our relaxation and recreation.

This past year, the July floods showed us how healthy habitats are deeply connected with our daily lives. Functioning wetlands, healthy stream buffers, and intact forests mitigated the impacts of heavy rains in several areas and will continue to do so into the future. Conserved and protected areas help ensure these habitat features remain on the landscape.

The Vermont Habitat Stamp Fund directly benefits Vermont’s fish, wildlife, their habitats, and the people that enjoy them. We appreciate every dollar raised through this fund and wholeheartedly thank you for your continued support and interest in conserving Vermont’s fish, wildlife, and the wild places that support them.

By The Numbers

Total Conservation Funding:

\$656,425*

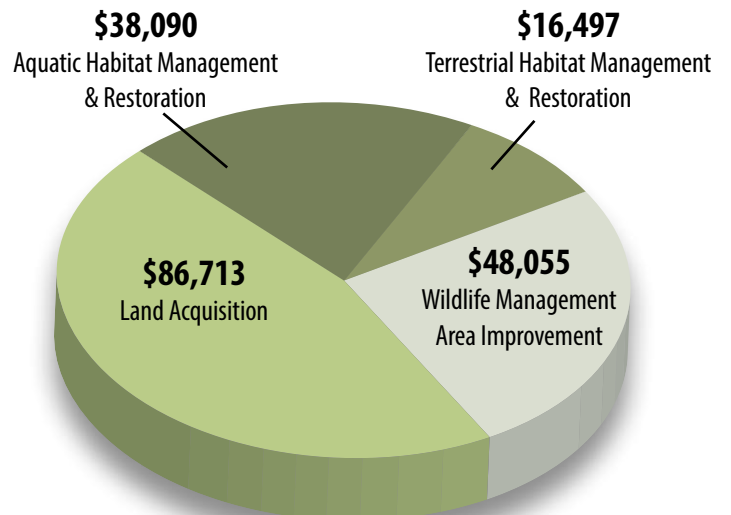
Where the Money Came From

- ❖ Total number of donations: **14,479**
- ❖ Total dollar amount: **\$238,513**
 - ◆ Amount of donations: **\$208,320**
 - ◆ Amount of interest earned: **\$30,193**
- ❖ Average donation amount: **\$14.38**
- ❖ Additional dollars leveraged in federal funds: **\$417,912**

Total Vermont Habitat Stamp Funds Spent:

\$189,355**

How the Money Was Spent



* Dates are 12/01/22 through 11/30/23

** These figures only include Vermont Habitat Stamp Fund expenditures, not federal funds.

Birds and Beyond

In 2023, Andrea Shortsleeve and other Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department (VFWD) biologists worked with private landowners and conservation partners to improve habitat for songbirds, pollinators, game species, and other wildlife.

❖ Working with Private Landowners and Town Forests

Andrea assisted landowners on **23 different properties in 19 towns** around Vermont, offering technical support through one-on-one guidance and helping Vermonters to improve their properties for native pollinators, songbirds, amphibians, bats, white-tailed deer, turkeys, and other wildlife.

In 2023, VFWD partnered with the Chittenden County Forester and Vermont Coverts to use Vermont Habitat Stamp funds on four town forests in Chittenden County to improve wildlife habitat:

- ◆ 15 acres of invasive plant control and 60 acres of oak tree release, **Andrews Community Forest in Richmond**
- ◆ 4 acres of shrubland bird habitat created, **LaPlatte Headwaters Town Forest in Hinesburg**
- ◆ 3 acres of young forest habitat created, **Preston Pond Conservation Area in Bolton**
- ◆ 5 acres of pre-commercial thinning completed to promote structural diversity, **Misty Meadows Trails and Forest in Westford**



VFWD provided private landowners and conservation partners with technical assistance to improve habitat for song birds, pollinators, game species and other wildlife.

Eric Sorenson - Swamp Milkweed

❖ Partnering in Conservation

In 2023, to provide Vermonters with the best possible technical assistance available, VFWD wildlife biologists worked with more than **25 different partner organizations**, including **Audubon Vermont**, the **New England Chapter of Backcountry Hunters and Anglers**, the **Fletcher Free Library**, **Vermont Coverts**, **NorthWoods Stewardship Center**, the **National Wild Turkey Federation**, and the **Ruffed Grouse Society**.

A new partnership was formed this year using Vermont Habitat Stamp funds to promote native plants and native pollinators. Working with **Caledonia Spirits** and **Bee the Change**, VFWD was able to support the creation of three demonstration gardens at the **Barr Hill Distillery in Montpelier**. The gardens focused on the connection between pollinator habitat and the food we consume, exhibited how Vermonters can create pollinator habitat at their homes (even if they own a small parcel), and highlighted the beauty of our native wildflowers. We also began site preparation on a small meadow at the entrance to the distillery, which will be planted next year with plants and flowers native to our region.

❖ Providing Workshops and Trainings

2023, VFWD habitat biologists created and provided over two dozen workshops, training events, presentations, and media interviews and articles. Topics included: allowing hunters on private property, how recreation can impact wildlife, the importance of deer wintering areas, and developing your own personal land ethic.

Of particular interest this year, Andrea and colleague Travis Hart **conducted a seminar for consulting foresters and other natural resource professionals** focused on how to control invasive plants to benefit wildlife habitat. Over 40 people attended the event.



Working with Caledonia Spirits and Bee the Change, the department and the Vermont Habitat Stamp Fund supported the creation of three pollinator habitat demonstration gardens at the Barr Hill Distillery in Montpelier.

Andrea Shortsleeve

Cold Water Connections

In 2023, fish biologists worked with Aquatic Habitat Biologist Will Eldridge to improve VFWD lands, improve aquatic organism passage, and protect and restore instream cover to restore habitat for fish and other wildlife along Vermont's rivers and streams.

❖ Improving Riparian Areas on VFWD Lands and Elsewhere

In 2023, Vermont Habitat Stamp funds were used to kick off restoration of a 12-acre forested floodplain on the **Upper Lamoille Streambank Management Area** in **Wolcott**. Fish Biologists and partners treated 2-acres of invasive knotweed, planted 1,039 trees along 1,500 feet of riverbank, and prepared 10 acres of former hay field for seeding next year.

Will and Fish Division staff monitored tree plantings at 81 plots across 15 riparian restoration projects to better understand practices that increase tree survival and natural regeneration. Overall tree plantings are doing well but reed canary grass and knotweed remain significant obstacles.

Will also worked with district biologists to assess Streambank Management Areas for public access, habitat quality, and constraints to reforestation. A total of 25 SMAs in the in the **Ottawaquechee, Lamoille, White, and Winooski River watersheds** were assessed.

❖ Eliminating Barriers to Aquatic Organism Passage

In May 2023, the removal of the Blake Higgins Dam on the **Saxton River** was showcased to promote the Vermont Habitat Stamp. Funds raised during this campaign will be used to remove the dam in **Weathersfield** to restore the natural habitat and reconnect the river for trout, sea lamprey, and American eel which, migrate to Vermont from the Atlantic Ocean.



Vermont Habitat Stamp funds will be used to help remove the Blake Higgins Dam on the Saxton River in Weathersfield. to restore the natural habitat and reconnect the river for trout

Jessica Louissos SLR



Vermont Habitat Stamp funds helped improve aquatic organism passage, and protect and restore instream cover to restore habitat for fish and other wildlife along Vermont's rivers and streams.

Josh Morse - Brook Trout

Will also coordinated the VFWD regulatory review of road stream crossings ensuring that aquatic organism passage is provided when culverts are repaired or replaced; acted as the VFWD liaison with the Vermont Agency of Transportation and the Department of Environmental Conservation on aquatic organism passage issues; worked with 11 aquatic connectivity groups around the state to enhance passage at road stream crossings and dams; taught Rivers and Roads trainings to state and municipal staff and consultants; participated on the Vermont Dam Task Force; and provided technical assistance to regional efforts focused on enhancing aquatic organism passage at road stream crossings.

❖ Instream Cover

Following the 2023 floods, Will and Fish Biologists worked with partners and the media to educate the public on the value of leaving wood and boulders in streams and rivers for fish and flood resiliency. Will conducted 12 interviews with TV news programs, newspapers, and regional podcasts.

In 2023, Vermont Habitat Stamp funds were used to restore a section of **Pinney Hollow Brook** that was dredged following Tropical Storm Irene in 2011. Trout used to be abundant here, but the habitat and the fish have yet to recover. Fish Biologists worked with the **Two Rivers Ottawaquechee Regional Planning Commission** to incorporate root wads into the restoration effort to enhance the aquatic habitat.

Room to Roam

The Vermont Habitat Stamp is essential for the stewardship of the department's 101 Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs). Each dollar donated leverages an additional three dollars from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service for WMA habitat management.

❖ Improvements on State Lands

The Narrows WMA, Benson

- ❖ **3.4 acres of early successional habitat** was created, and **14 acres of invasive plants** were

treated in partnership with Audubon Vermont to improve foraging and nesting sites for golden-winged warblers and other songbirds.

Elm Brook WMA, Fairfield

- ◆ **2.5 acres of mast trees were released, and 16 acres of old pasture were re-started** with the help of National Wild Turkey Federation volunteers to improve wildlife food abundance and native plant diversity.

South Bay WMA, Newport

- ◆ **10 acres of invasive plants** were controlled along the Black River, and **644 trees and shrubs were planted** in partnership with crews from the NorthWoods Stewardship Center.

Dead Creek WMA, Addison

- ◆ **Three impoundment dams were cleared of invasive species** in partnership with Vermont Youth Conservation Corps to increase their longevity and support native pollinators and waterfowl on the refuge.



Vermont Habitat Stamp funds supported the work of the Vermont Youth Conservation Corps to clear three impoundment dams of invasive species to improve habitat for pollinators and waterfowl.

VFWD

Windsor Grasslands WMA, Windsor

- ◆ **13 acres of invasive species were treated** in preparation to plant the understory of an old orchard with native fruiting shrubs in partnership with the Ascutney Mountain Audubon. This orchard is both a birding hot spot and a bird hunting destination.

Statewide Invasive Contract

- ◆ **68 acres of department-owned lands** were treated for invasive species at the **Turner Hill, Missing Link, Roaring Brook, Willoughby Falls, Steam Mill Brook, and Elm Brook WMAs** in the towns of **Grafton, Rockingham, Vernon, Orleans, Walden, and Fairfield**, respectively.

Acquisitions

In May 2023, VFWD completed an expansion of **Otter Creek WMA** in **Wallingford** using Vermont Habitat

Stamp funds. 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.

The Otter Creek Wildlife Management Area showcases superb floodplain habitat in the upper part of Otter Creek with areas of large wet meadows, habitat for grassland birds, and alder swales to support woodcock and other shrubland birds. The expanded portion of the WMA will provide improved public access for trout fishing, duck hunting, and wildlife watching.

This addition to the WMA is a substantial East-West habitat connection spanning from the Taconic Mountains in the west, across Route 7 and Otter Creek, and eastward up to the Green Mountain National Forest and the spine of the Green Mountains. This connection will allow for greater movement of wildlife from Vermont's longest river to our tallest mountains. Additionally, the extensive wetlands and floodplains that are now part of the WMA will provide habitat for a diversity of wildlife and a safeguard for local communities by decreasing flood risk downstream.

Financial and conservation partners on this project included the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the Trust for Public Land, the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, the Vermont River Conservancy, the Vermont Department of Forest Parks and Recreation, and the U.S. Forest Service. This is a truly collaborative conservation success story aided in major part by contributions to the Vermont Habitat Stamp Fund.

Looking Ahead

The year 2024 promises to be another exciting and productive year for habitat conservation, restoration, and enhancement in Vermont. VFWD is looking ahead to focus our May fundraiser on grassland habitat to benefit meadowlarks and bobolinks, insect communities, Northern harriers, American kestrels, and other wildlife such as turkey, white-tailed deer, and woodcock.

Thank you for your donation in 2023. Your continued support conserves land, protects clean water, and restores healthy wildlife habitat for all to enjoy. Please help to continue Vermont's conservation legacy by donating to the 2024 Vermont Habitat Stamp: vthabitatstamp.com



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