

2024 Vermont Habitat Stamp Annual Report

Dead Creek Wildlife Management Area
Photo by Joshua Morse, VFWD



The resiliency and connectivity of rivers, streams, and wetlands once again dominated the headlines in 2024 as major flooding occurred across the state. To this end, maintaining wildlife connections and creating healthy, resilient habitats continued to be a major focus of the work of the Vermont Department of Fish & Wildlife. The Vermont Habitat Stamp funds exemplified this effort in 2024 and were used to restore a forested floodplain in Wolcott, to remove a dam in Weathersfield, and to conserve wetlands and connect lands in Brandon and Cornwall. 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 whole-heartedly 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:
\$415,154*

Where the Money Came From

- ❖ Total number of donations: **14,901**
- ❖ Total dollar amount: **\$243,888**
 - ◆ Amount of donations: **\$209,996**
 - ◆ Amount of interest earned: **\$33,892**
- ❖ Average donation amount: **\$14.22**
- ❖ Additional dollars leveraged in federal funds: **\$171,266**

Total Vermont Habitat Stamp Funds Spent:
\$129,385**

- ❖ Dollar amount spent on WMA improvement: **\$50,582**
- ❖ Dollar amount spent on Aquatic Habitat Management and Restoration: **\$78,803**



Joshua Morse

* 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 2024, Andrea Shortsleeve, Travis Hart, 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 and Travis assisted landowners on **96 different properties in 62 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 addition to visiting privately-owned properties, Andrea provided technical assistance to seven town forests in Duxbury, Newbury, Goshen, Wolcott, Lincoln, Ferrisburgh, and Richmond to help guide forest management plans and improve wildlife habitat on these community-owned properties.

Also on town forest property, Andrea partnered with Peregrine Productions of Waterbury to finish a 2023 Vermont Habitat Stamp funded project on four town forests in Chittenden County to improve wildlife habitat. Working with the Chittenden County Forester and Vermont Coverts Executive Director, the group created four two-minute-long videos highlighting the benefits of habitat management and the Vermont Habitat Stamp Fund at the Andrews Community Forest in Richmond, the LaPlatte Headwaters Town Forest in Hinesburg, the Preston Pond Conservation Area in Bolton, and the Misty Meadows Trails and Forest in Westford. The videos can be found on Vermont Fish and Wildlife's YouTube channel.

Partnering in Conservation

In 2024, to provide Vermonters with the best possible technical assistance available, VFWD wildlife



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

Joshua Blouin

biologists worked with more than **20 different partner organizations**, including Audubon Vermont, the New England Chapter of Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Vermont Coverts, Logger Education to Advance Professionalism, NorthWoods Stewardship Center, Land Ethic Vermont, Women & Our Woods - Vermont, UVM Extension, Vermont Woodlands Association, the National Wild Turkey Federation, and the Ruffed Grouse Society.

❖ Outreach

In 2024, 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.

Cold Water Connections

Vermont Fish and Wildlife fish biologists continued efforts to restore habitat for fish and other wildlife along streams and rivers throughout Vermont in 2024. During this past year, District Fish Biologists and Aquatic Habitat Biologist Will Eldridge worked to improve aquatic organism passage, improve streamside habitat, and protect and restore instream cover.

❖ Eliminating Barriers to Aquatic Organism Passage

In 2024, the Connecticut River Conservancy used Vermont Habitat Stamp funds to remove the **Blake**



Habitat Stamp funds have helped improve turkey habitat across the state.

Lilian Kittredge

Higgins Dam on the Saxtons River in Weathersfield. The obsolete dam under US 5 was removed to restore the natural habitat and to reconnect the Connecticut River for Sea Lamprey and American Eel. This restoration project was one of the first in the state to target these species, which amazingly migrate from Vermont to the Atlantic Ocean each year.

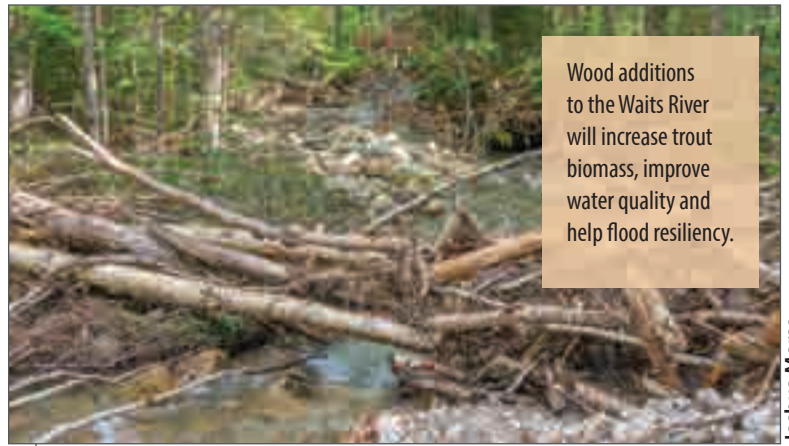
In 2024, the Caledonia NRC used Vermont Habitat Stamp funds to design replacement structures for four priority aquatic organism passage barriers in the **Stannard Brook** watershed in Stannard and **East Brook** in Groton. The new stream crossing structures will restore aquatic organism passage and enhance flood resiliency on streams that support abundant wild brook trout populations.

Also in 2024, the Friends of the Winooski River used Vermont Habitat Stamp funds to study the feasibility of removing the **Old Batchelder Dam** on the Winooski River in Plainfield. The dam is no longer in service, but it continues to stop the upstream movement by aquatic organisms and impact the habitat for miles upstream and downstream.

Will 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 VTrans and DEC 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.

❖ Improving Streamside Areas

This year, Will and Fish Biologists continued to restore a 12-acre forested floodplain on the Upper Lamoille Streambank Management Area in Wolcott. A 500-foot berm along the Lamoille River was removed and reseeded with a mixture of herbaceous plants and trees. Willow stakes were also planted in areas where knotweed



Wood additions to the Waits River will increase trout biomass, improve water quality and help flood resiliency.

Joshua Morse

had been treated the previous year. About 10 acres of former hay field were also tilled in preparation for direct seeding with floodplain tree species in the spring and fall of 2024.

In 2024, the Friends of the Winooski River used Vermont Habitat Stamp funds to help restore 2.8 acres of forested riparian area on a farm along the **North Branch of the Winooski River** in Worcester. FWR previously used Vermont Habitat Stamp funds to plant trees in the riparian zone, and this year followed up with critical maintenance to ensure their continued survival.

❖ Promoting Instream Cover

In the wake of of yet another year of devastating flooding, Will and Fish Biologists continued to educate the public and others on the ecological values of log jams for fish and flood resiliency. Will and Fish Biologists spoke about the benefits of trees and boulders in streams and rivers during 2 interviews with TV news programs and newspapers, 1 town meeting, and 3 Rivers and Roads and 1 Highways and Habitats trainings for VTrans, municipalities, and others working with road infrastructure.

Fish Biologists also helped jumpstart the restoration of log jams in the headwaters of the **Waits River within the Groton State Forest** by strategically adding wood to over 2 miles of streams where wood had historically been removed. VFWD monitoring of prior strategic wood addition has demonstrated an increase in trout numbers and reconnected the floodplain which can help with water quality and flood resiliency.

Room to Roam

The Vermont Habitat Stamp is essential for the stewardship of the department's 103 Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs). Each dollar donated leverages an additional three dollars from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service for WMA habitat management.

❖ Improvements

During the past year, Vermont Habitat Stamp funds were



Chesapeake Bay Program/CC

The removal of the Blake Higgins Dam improves habitat connectivity for the American Eel.

used at WMAs throughout the state to control invasive plant species, enhance young forest habitat, and release wildlife-food producing trees.

The Narrows WMA, Benson

- ◆ Following up on a 2023 habitat enhancement project in a partnership with Audubon Vermont where 3.4 acres of young forest were created, an additional 14-acres of invasive plants were treated on the WMA to control their spread. A breeding bird survey completed in June revealed that several migratory songbirds were using the area, including a **blue-winged warbler, rose-breasted grosbeak, indigo bunting, eastern wood peewee, and scarlet tanager**, among many other species.

Windsor Grasslands WMA, Windsor

- ◆ **4.4 acres of invasive species treated**, and 125 native trees and shrubs were planted in a partnership with Ascutney Mountain Audubon Society. This work will enhance shrubland bird habitat and viewing on the WMA, which is both a birding hot spot and a bird hunting destination. Native chokecherry, black chokeberry, alternate leaf dogwood, silky dogwood and shadbush were among the fruit-producing species planted. These shrubs and trees will also improve pollinator habitat throughout the growing season, providing pollen and nectar sources for our native pollinators.

Statewide Invasives Contract

- ◆ 64 acres of department-owned lands were treated for invasive species at the Windsor Grasslands, Missing Link, Roaring Brook, Steam Mill Brook, Bill Sladyk, Elm Brook, The Narrows, Whipple Hollow, South Bay and Plymbsbury WMAs in the towns of Windsor, Rockingham, Vernon, Walden, Holland, Fairfield, Benson, Pittsford, Coventry and Shrewsbury, respectively.

Joshua Morse

Haymaker Bun Company donated portions of their grassland themed bun to the Vermont Habitat Stamp in May 2024.



◆ Acquisitions

Vermont Habitat Stamp funds provide valuable non-federal match to draw down additional funds for conservation and land acquisition projects. Every dollar spent during the pre-acquisition phase has the potential to be matched three times over with federal funds complete land acquisition projects.

In 2024, Vermont Habitat Stamp funds were used to explore and plan for new land acquisition projects in

the Northeast Kingdom and along the Otter Creek. Will Duane, the land acquisition coordinator for the Department, is currently working with landowners near the Brandon Swamp and Cornwall Swamp Wildlife Management Areas to fulfill the long-term plan of connecting the Brandon Swamp and Cornwall Swamp with public lands for hunting, angling, trapping, birding, and other forms of wildlife-based recreation.

For 2025, Vermont Habitat Stamp funds will continue to be used for land acquisition projects that add public land for wildlife habitat, public access, flood water storage, and water quality improvements.

◆ May Fundraiser

Donations made to the Vermont Habitat Stamp Fund during the month of May went to supporting grassland habitat restoration and protection across the state. Grasslands are unique and special places on our landscape which provide habitat for a variety of rare and uncommon species, including the eastern meadowlark, bobolink, northern harrier, American kestrel, upland sandpiper, and grasshopper sparrow. They are also home to many other species such as bees, butterflies, turtles, whip-poor-wills, turkeys, American woodcock, white-tailed deer, and more.

We partnered with the Haymaker Bun Company, who created a grassland-themed bun to sell as a fundraiser to help increase awareness and donations for the Vermont Habitat Stamp. Thanks to Haymaker Bun Co. and generous public support, the overall May campaign was a sweet success with over \$38,000 raised for grasslands restoration work.



Looking Ahead

The year 2025 promises to be another exciting and productive year for habitat conservation, restoration, and enhancement in Vermont. We'll be highlighting aquatic resiliency and the benefits of Strategic Wood Additions to improve riparian and aquatic habitat for brook trout and other fish species.

Thank you for your donation in 2024. 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 2025 Habitat Stamp: vthabitatstamp.com



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