

**VERMONT FISH & WILDLIFE
DEPARTMENT**

**FISHING ACCESS AREA PROGRAM
2019 MAINTENANCE AND CONSTRUCTION REPORT**

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Submitted by:
Louis Porter, Commissioner
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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 2019, 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 2019, there were 124,755 licensed hunters, anglers, and trappers and approximately 29,000 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 \$398,240 in FY19 from motorboat registration fees per 23 V.S.A. § 3319, which directs 34% of the fees to the Fishing Access Area Program. 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 FY19, the SFR apportionment for Vermont fishing access areas was \$555,600, which is an increase of over \$74,000 from last year. This increase was offset by a \$50,000+ decrease in state motorboat registration fees paid to the Department.

Over the past 10 years both state and federal funding for fishing access areas has been following a general downward trend. SFR funds hit a high in FY09 at \$606,700, hit a 10-year low in FY18 (\$481,500), then rebounded in FY19 (\$555,600). Even with this past year's rebound in funding, that is still a 10% decrease in funding during this period. Motorboat registration revenue has been even more erratic with a cycle of increasing revenue one year, then falling the following. This cycle has been happening since 2012 and funding has dropped over 21% from its 10-year high in FY11 ((\$482,554).

Capital appropriations have helped to buffer the erratic and declining funding dedicated to the Fishing Access Area Program. 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 ramp repairs and dock replacements or purchases, which has improved accessibility for all fishing access area users.

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MAINTENANCE & INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS

In calendar year 2019, the Fishing Access Area Program spent \$820,800 on basic maintenance, capital improvements, and infrastructure projects (Table 1). Expenditures ranged from \$1,893 for municipal clean water fees to over \$124,000 for site work, including gravel and grading, ditch cleaning, and tree removals. As usual, the bulk of the program's expenditures went to pay for facility operation and maintenance (\$476,700), which includes activities like mowing, trash pick-up, parking lot and driveway grading, dock maintenance, snow removal, and portable toilet services.

Total expenditures for the Fishing Access Area Program decreased by \$74,000 over the previous year and is down nearly \$130,000 from 2017. This decline in expenditures is due to the reduced number of completed infrastructure projects. Similar to 2017 and 2018, dock and ADA projects were completed in 2019, but not to the scale of previous years. This is partially due to decreased funding, but also due to extensive planning for projects in 2020-21.

Typical capital funded projects include replacing aging docks, upgrading rundown boat ramps, and repairing eroding shorelines. This funding has significantly increased the program's ability to complete projects around the state in the face of declining revenues. Since 2012, 72 different projects benefited from capital funding at 68 different access areas around the state. Between 2015 and 2019, the access program completed 61 infrastructure projects, 33 of which were partially or wholly funded with the \$759,000 of capital funding provided to the Department over that time (Table 2). This past year, 3 dock projects were completed, which were paid for exclusively with capital funding (Figure 1).

In addition, to reduce seasonal maintenance costs and reduce stormwater runoff into adjacent waters, staff implemented several stormwater improvement projects. By partnering with the Northwoods Stewardship Center, the Department was able to complete 3 projects in the Northeast Kingdom (Island Pond, Spectacle Pond, and Seymour Lake). These projects captured stormwater from driveways and parking areas, which was diverted into constructed retention ponds or new vegetation areas where water will be filtered and infiltrate into the ground (Figure 2).

FUTURE PROJECTS

This past year was focused on laying the groundwork for several projects for 2020-21. These projects include a number of new accessible docks, ramp improvements, and stormwater infrastructure upgrades.

The southern portion of the Connecticut River has limited access for motorboats, which is further complicated by high silt loads being deposited on ramps due to continual water level fluctuations resulting from the hydroelectric facilities on the river. One such site is the Dummerston Access Area, which is currently unusable to all motorboats and many paddlecraft. Throughout 2019, the Department worked with agency engineers to design and permit an entirely new ramp that will accommodate motorboats and preclude sediment build-up. A contract for the new ramp was executed in November and construction will begin June 2020.

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The Department is also working with a hydrological engineering company to make modifications to 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 ramp is located in an area on the river that is prone to high sediment loads, which makes it unusable once water levels in the river and on Champlain begin to drop to typical summer levels. The ramp has been dredged in the recent past, but the cost and frequency required to keep it open to boats is not sustainable. The Department plans to identify an engineering solution that will prevent siltation or create a natural flushing mechanism to keep the ramp open to boaters throughout the open water season. Proposals for retrofitting the ramp are being worked on through the winter of 2020. Once a proposal is selected, final designs, permitting, and contracting for construction will be completed. It has yet to be determined if the ramp work will be complete during the summer of 2020 or 2021.

By their very nature, access areas are required to be adjacent to water. As such, issues can arise related to stormwater run-off into nearby waters. In an effort to reduce siltation and nutrient deposition issues, the Department hired two summer interns to gather data related to stormwater infrastructure at every access area. Data collected included, but was not limited to the amount of impervious surface and green space, slope of driveways and parking areas, extent of any erosion, and amount of riparian vegetation present. Data were entered into a formula to create a metric for ranking each site. Access areas with the highest ranking were identified as candidates to receive stormwater improvements. Following this assessment, staff began working with the Department of Environmental Conservation to identify funding opportunities and with planning commissions and non-profits to complete needed improvements. The Lamoille County Planning Commission has already received a grant to complete a stormwater improvement project at the Dorothy Smith Fishing Access Area on the Lamoille River.

ACCESSIBILITY IMPROVEMENTS

In 2018, the Department began a concerted effort to initiate projects that would make access areas fully compliant with the current Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards. Most of these projects involve adding or identifying ADA parking spaces and creating accessible routes to either a fishing platform or courtesy dock. There are currently 25 fishing access areas that are fully accessible (12.24%). The Department plans to increase the number of accessible sites to 75 (38%) by 2029. One accessibility project was completed this past year by installing a parking area and walkway to the new wheel dock at the Norton Pond Access Area (Figure 3).

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, 2019. *See Table 2 for a more detailed breakdown of infrastructure improvements.*

PROJECT DESCRIPTION	AMOUNT
Construction Planning Projects	\$ 19,872.97
Stormwater Improvements	\$ 2,722.16
Capital Funded Infrastructure Improvements (ADA Accessible Docks)	\$ 43,043.74
Site Work Maintenance (i.e. gravel, grading, excavation)	\$124,077.07
Dock Maintenance	\$ 57,752.06
Weekly Grounds Maintenance	
<i>Department of Corrections Community Restitution Crews</i>	\$ 57,390.06
<i>Lawn and Maintenance Services (Not DOC)</i>	\$ 6,322.00
Portable Toilet Rentals	\$ 86,172.94
Snow Removal	\$ 57,268.50
Purchase of materials, supplies, equipment rentals, etc.	\$ 5,555.25
Payments for Public Access on Private Lands (i.e. leases)	\$ 3,100.00
PILOT (payments in lieu of taxes)	\$ 57,435.69
Engineering & staff time – admin, design, & construction	\$242,700.13
New Program Vehicle	\$ 27,352.00
Signage	\$ 8,582.16
Clean Water fees	\$ 1,893.33
Utilities	\$ 5,111.30
Permitting	\$ 1,988.20
Traffic Control (Colchester Police Department)	\$ 3,711.68
Trash Disposal	\$ 1,618.15
Professional Memberships & Meetings	\$ 4,558.05
Miscellaneous Administrative Expenses (gas, IT, etc.)	\$ 2,572.89
TOTAL FISHING ACCESS AREA EXPENDITURES	\$820,800.33

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Table 2. List of infrastructure projects costing <\$100,000 for fishing access areas from 2015 through 2019. Projects were funded with either state motorboat registration or capital funds, and often cost shared with Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration funding.

	SITE	PROJECT DESCRIPTION	COST
2015	Allen Point	Fishing platform	\$ 8,500.00
	Lake Iroquois	Ramp construction & shoreline restoration	\$ 24,558.72
	Ward Marsh	Gravel ramp construction	\$ 5,250.00
	Lake Hortonia East	Ramp construction & parking lot upgrade	\$ 21,324.06
	Peacham Pond	Ramp construction & parking lot upgrade	\$ 25,621.74
	McIntosh Pond	Ramp construction & parking lot upgrade	\$ 21,881.49
	Evanoika	New ADA dock (32 ft)	\$ 27,660.00
	Colchester Point	New ADA dock (70 ft)	\$ 49,175.00
	Kings Bay	New dock (30 ft)	\$ 23,500.00
	Holcomb Bay	New dock anchor to make dock ADA (50 ft)	\$ 18,590.00
	Big Salem	New ADA dock (50 ft)	\$ 31,700.00
	Stephenson's Point	New dock (30 ft)	\$ 23,500.00
		2015 TOTAL	
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
		2016 TOTAL	
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

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SITE	PROJECT DESCRIPTION	COST
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
	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 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
	5 YEAR TOTAL	\$ 1,026,935.38

*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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Figure 1. Newly installed 60 ft dock, summer 2019, at the Chittenden Reservoir Access Area in Chittenden, VT.

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Figure 2. Three stormwater improvement projects were completed during the summer 2019, where vegetated retention areas were created to capture, filter, and infiltrate run-off from parking areas. Prior to these improvements, stormwater would run directly from the parking areas into the lake or to a ditch, which directed water into the lake. From top left clockwise: Island Pond, Spectacle Pond, and Seymour Lake.

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Figure 3. New ADA path and parking area constructed this past summer (2019) to link a courtesy dock (2018) and parking area at the Norton Pond Access Area, Norton, VT.