

# VERMONT FISH & WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT

## Wildlife Habitat Management Report

### Wildlife Management Areas



WINTER 2005

Legislative Briefing

Agency of Natural Resources

The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department owns 85 Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) totaling over 118,000 acres. WMAs play an important role in meeting the department's mission. Management of these areas particularly emphasizes the conservation of fish and wildlife and their habitats, and provides people with an opportunity to enjoy these resources through fish and wildlife-based activities.

WMAs have been purchased over time using several funding sources, including funds from hunting license sales, USFWS Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration (Pittman-Robertson) Fund, Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, and the Land and Water Conservation Fund. Management and administration of all WMAs is primarily paid for through USFWS Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Funds.

As with other Vermont Agency of Natural Resource lands, the management of WMAs is guided by Long Range Management Plans (LRMP). LRMPs are based on a thorough natural resources inventory and public input gathered through various stages and avenues. Management

activities primarily focus on providing for a diversity of fish and wildlife habitat as well as quality opportunities for fish and wildlife-based outdoor activities (e.g., hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing).



*Capital funds were used to improve WMA roads and bridges necessary for commercial timber harvests, for example upgrading this winter truck road on Steam Mill Brook WMA.*

Wildlife habitat enhancement activities are conducted through both commercial and non-commercial means to provide the rich diversity of habitat seral stages necessary to meet the habitat needs of all wildlife species.

### Property Administration

An essential component of any land management program is the maintenance of the property's boundaries and infrastructure, such as roads and bridges. Without these efforts, the habitat management and public use goals of each area may not be achievable. The 85 WMAs routinely require boundary line surveying and maintenance, building maintenance, signage, trash removal, and responses to encroachments and other trespasses. Recently, great strides have been made in erecting signs and informational kiosks on WMAs to better advertise their locations and opportunities for fish and wildlife-based activities. In addition, maps of all WMAs are on the department website with a written narrative overview describing each WMA.

The following maintenance activities were completed on WMAs during the 2004 calendar year:

- Installed or repaired 10 culverts or bridges
- Maintained 10 buildings
- Mowed grassed areas and maintained 15 dams and dikes
- Maintained 62 miles of forest roads
- Improved 9 parking areas
- Erected 6 new WMA signs
- Maintained 27.5 miles of property boundary lines
- Erected or repaired 20 gates

### Non-commercial Wildlife Habitat Management

Non-commercial fish and wildlife habitat management activities include those activities where the habitat is enhanced through methods other than standard timber sale contracts. In most cases, department wildlife biologists, other Agency of Natural Resources staff, volunteers, or private contractors perform these management activities.

The following non-commercial wildlife management activities were conducted during the 2004 calendar year:

- Installed or maintained 6 beaver wetland control devices
- Burned, brushhogged, or mowed 942 acres of grassland clearings
- Released 220 apple trees and 5 acres of old orchards
- Planted 105 apple trees and 7 acres of mast trees
- Burned or brushhogged 150 acres of old field habitat
- Restored 700 feet of streambank by planting 215 trees
- Managed wetland levels on 755 acres of waterfowl habitat
- Created 11 acres of waterfowl or herbaceous food patches
- Maintained 774 waterfowl nest structures
- Installed 3 eagle or osprey nest structures
- Thinned saplings on 7 acres of future deer winter habitat
- Constructed 3 browse impact monitoring exclosures
- Conducted 23 habitat/wildlife inventories

## Commercial Wildlife Habitat Management

Commercial wildlife habitat management activities can enhance forest wildlife habitat by removing merchantable wood products. Commercial logging operations also improve public access for fish and wildlife-based activities by helping the department develop or maintain WMA roads, culverts and bridges. All revenues generated by the commercial sale of timber on WMAs are “program income” and the money earned is reinvested into the



*A “brontosaurus” was used to reclaim old fields, release apple trees and create early forest succession habitat at several WMAs.*

management of these lands.

Timber sale receipts from commercial forest management activities on WMAs have declined in recent years. The need for more

extensive inventories of the archeological and natural resources of the WMAs, as well as changes in staffing levels and priorities are the reasons for the decline.

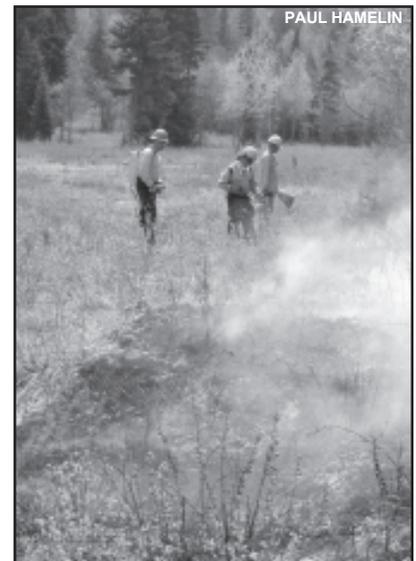


*Fence exclosures will allow biologists to monitor the impact of moose browsing on forest regeneration in new clearcuts.*

Table 1 reports the actual commercial wildlife habitat management activities on WMAs in FY04. Variations in harvesting volumes across different regions of the state are a result of disparities in acreages of WMAs, staffing levels, stand conditions, and work priorities.

In 2003 the department entered into a partnership with the Ruffed Grouse Society (RGS) to address a backlog of pending timber harvests on WMAs, and to accelerate the level of non-commercial habitat management activities.

The 2004 Legislature appropriated \$40,000 in capital funds to the department to facilitate these activities. The RGS partnership and the capital appropriation have been productive, resulting in a dramatic increase in timber harvests and non-commercial habitat management activities on WMAs during FY05 and pending in FY06.



*Prescribed burning was used to maintain old fields on several WMA's, including West Mountain and Victory Basin.*

Figure 1 shows the statewide distribution of WMA timber harvests

implemented by ANR since 2003, commercial and non-commercial WMA habitat management activities conducted with these funding sources since 2003, and activities planned for 2005. Table 2 indicates the timber acreage and minimum projected income for 17 WMA timber sales that have been completely marked, tallied and sold, or are about to be sold in FY05.



*Commercial logging was used to improve deer wintering habitat and to create young forest habitat for species such as ruffed grouse, woodcock and snowshoe hare.*



*Hundreds of "soft mast" fruit trees such as wild apple, hawthorne, black cherry, and serviceberry were maintained by removing competing trees and brush.*

**Table 1. Wildlife Habitat Timber Harvests on Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department WMAs FY04**

| Management Activity      | District I*<br>Springfield | District II<br>Pittsford | District III<br>Barre | District IV<br>Essex | District V<br>St Johnsbury | State<br>Totals |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|-----------------|
| <b>Timber Management</b> |                            |                          |                       |                      |                            |                 |
| Acres Harvested          | approx. 1,300              | 117                      | 0                     | 48                   | 498                        | 663             |
| MBF                      | ?                          | 344                      | 0                     | 41                   | 294,336                    | 294,721         |
| Cords                    | ?                          | 328                      | 0                     | 55                   | 1,921                      | 2,304           |
| Bid \$\$'s               | \$0                        | \$15,369                 | \$0                   | \$11,700             | \$72,611                   | \$99,680        |

\*Timber rights privately owned.

**Table 2. Timber Harvests Re-activated, Sold or Ready to Sell on Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department WMAs as of January 1, 2005**

| District          | Number of<br>Sales | Deer Wintering<br>Area Improvement<br>Sale Acreage | Total<br>Acreage | Minimum Sale<br>\$ Value* |
|-------------------|--------------------|--|------------------|---------------------------|
| 1 - Springfield   | 1                  | 0  | 70               | \$6,847                   |
| 2 - Rutland       | 3                  | 0  | 112              | \$42,300                  |
| 3 - Barre         | 2                  | 117  | 142              | \$37,784                  |
| 4 - Essex         | 3                  | 135  | 172              | \$27,538                  |
| 5 - St. Johnsbury | 8                  | 131  | 1,383            | \$464,132                 |
| <b>Totals</b>     | <b>17</b>          | <b>383</b>   | <b>1,879</b>     | <b>\$578,601</b>          |

\*Based on actual price of purchased sales, minimum acceptable bid for sales ready to sell, or minimum sale value estimate based on volume of forest products. Revenues subject to winter operating conditions; total income may not be realized until June 30, 2007. Includes 3 sales (737 acres) valued at \$238, 800 that were marked by private forestry consultants hired with capital appropriations to The Ruffed Grouse Society and VT Fish & Wildlife Department.

NOTE: FY06 annual work plans include preparation of 10 additional timber harvests (1,041 acres) on 8 WMAs, of which 3 sales will be marked by private forestry consultants.

Figure 1. VT Fish & Wildlife Department WMA Habitat Improvement Project \* Locations 2003-2005

