

# VERMONT FISH & WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT

## Wildlife Habitat Management Report

### Wildlife Management Areas



2006 Annual Report

The Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department owns 86 Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) totaling over 118,000 acres. WMAs play an important role in meeting the department's mission. Management of these areas emphasizes the conservation of fish and wildlife and their habitats and provides people with opportunities to hunt, fish and trap and enjoy these resources through other fish and wildlife-based activities as well. These properties are important in providing public access for hunting, fishing and trapping and other wildlife based activities. Recent national surveys have documented that public lands play an integral role in providing opportunities for the public to hunt, fish and trap. The amount of time people spend in these activities often hinges on having a place to go afield to engage in the activity. Vermont's WMAs equal more than 184 square miles of lands that provide this public opportunity.

The Department has purchased WMA's using several funding sources, including funds from hunting license sales, US Fish & Wildlife Service (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 are primarily paid for through USFWS Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Funds.

Assistance from the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks, & Recreation (FPR) staff is essential for completing WMA long range management planning, property administration and habitat management projects. Wildlife habitat enhancement activities are conducted through commercial and non-commercial means to provide the rich diversity of habitat types and forest ages necessary to meet the needs of many wildlife species.

As with other Vermont Agency of Natural Resources lands, the management of WMAs is guided by Long Range Management Plans (LRMP). LRMPs are based on



VFWD Photo

In addition to providing habitat for many wildlife species, WMAs provide public access to over 184 square miles of land and many lakes, ponds, rivers, and streams.

a thorough natural resources inventory and public input gathered through various methods and stages. Management activities primarily focus on providing a diversity of fish and wildlife habitat as well as quality opportunities for fish and wildlife-based outdoor activities.

Although only a portion of the WMA acreage is suitable for active management practices (such as timber management, wetland water level control, agriculture, or wildlife opening maintenance), **all** of the land is highly valuable wildlife habitat. Natural wetlands, high elevation summits, cliffs and steep slopes, stream and pond buffers, and rare or fragile natural communities comprise a significant portion of the WMA's and contribute greatly to their diversity. Managing for habitat diversity conserves both rare and common plants and animals, enriching the experiences of all WMA users. The sight of a soaring eagle, a bright orange newt on emerald moss, and lynx tracks winding through the snow are simple pleasures that WMA's offer trout anglers, grouse hunters, and photographers alike. As Vermont continues to be fragmented by human infrastructure, the habitats provided by WMA's - both managed and "unmanaged" - will become increasingly valuable to the state's wildlife, as well as to humans who enjoy wildlife-based activities.

## Property Administration

An essential component of any land management program is the maintenance of the property's boundaries and infrastructure, such as roads, bridges, and signs. Without these efforts, the habitat management and public use goals of each area may not be achievable. The 86 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. WMA maps with a written narrative describing each WMA are available on the department website ([www.vtfishandwildlife.com](http://www.vtfishandwildlife.com)) and also compiled in a statewide atlas, *Guide to the Wildlife Management Areas of Vermont*.

The following maintenance activities were completed on WMAs during the 2006 calendar year:

- Installed or repaired **9** culverts or bridges
- Maintained **4** buildings
- Mowed/maintained **11** dams, dikes and levees
- Maintained **40.75** miles of forest roads
- Maintained **2640** feet of fence
- Improved/maintained **14** parking areas, constructed **2** new parking areas
- Maintained **22** WMA signs/kiosks and set **8** new kiosks
- Maintained **23.3** miles of property boundary lines
- Maintained **18** gates and installed 6 new ones
- Constructed **1000** feet of wetland boardwalks
- Conducted **10** cultural resource reviews
- Purchased **747** acres and inspected 10 sites
- Addressed **37** policy issues (encroachments, etc.)
- Conducted **8** presentations or press releases



VTWD Photo

WMA information kiosks are maintained at primary parking areas to inform visitors of the wildlife related benefits, opportunities, and regulations on the areas.

## Non-commercial Wildlife Habitat Management

Non-commercial fish and wildlife habitat management activities include projects 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.



Wayne Landre

Nesting structures maintained on WMA's provide essential habitat for some species, including wood ducks, mergansers, golden eyes, screech owls, and ospreys.

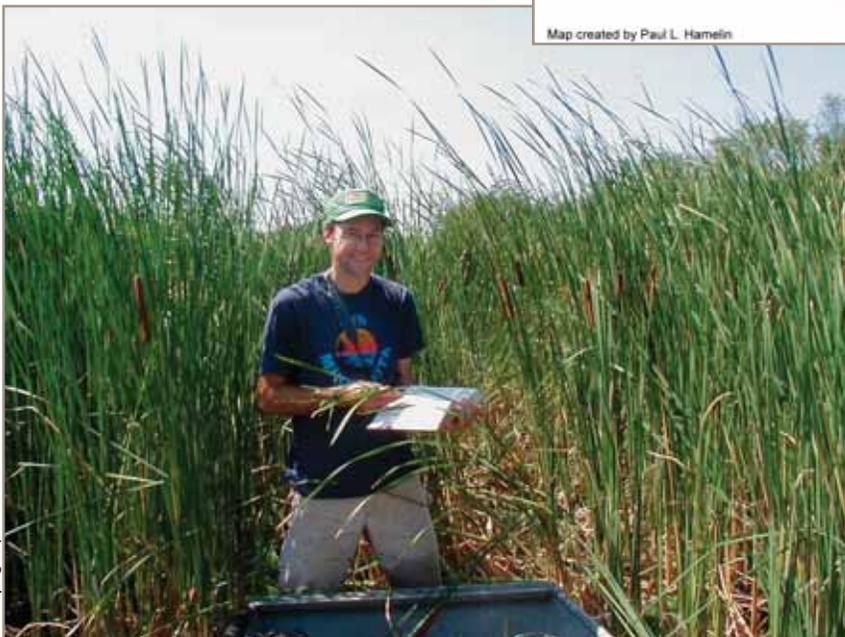
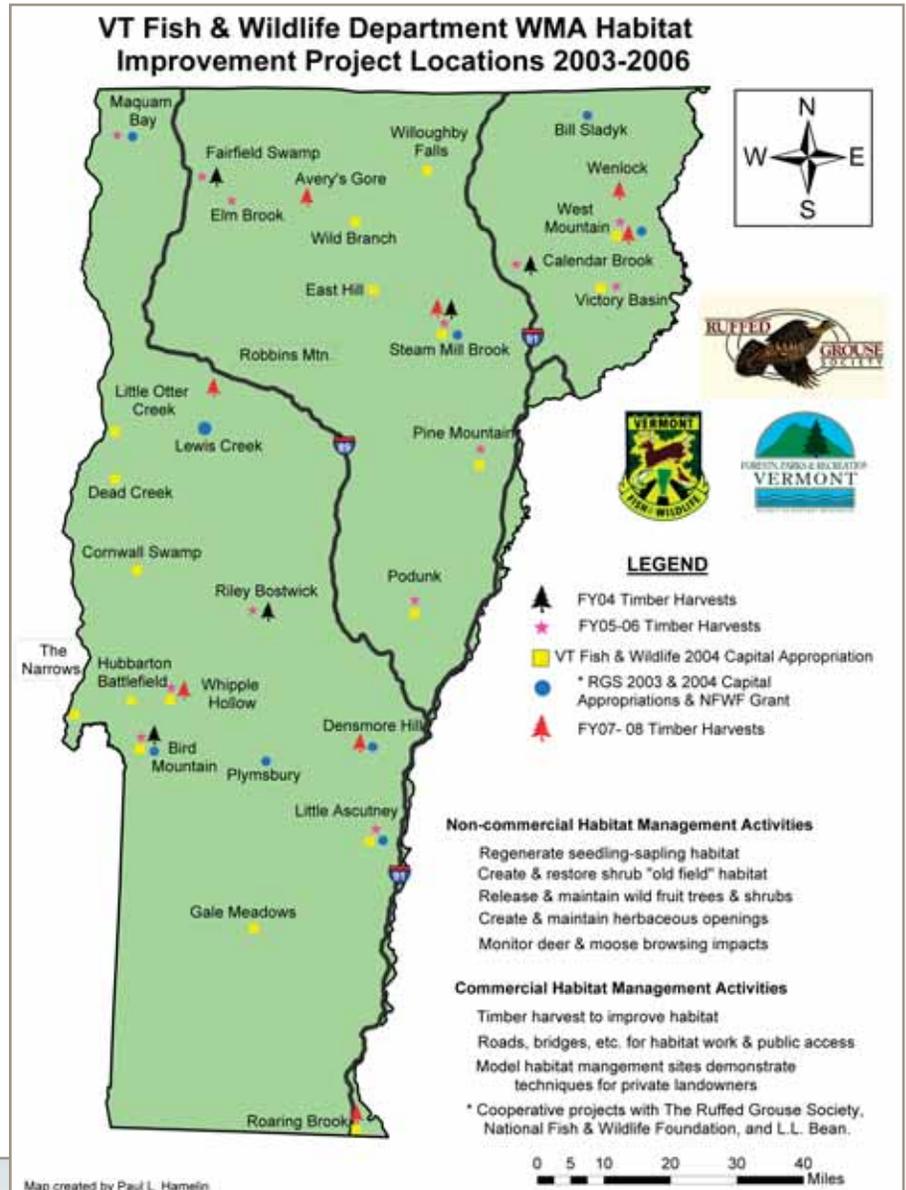
The following non-commercial wildlife management activities were conducted during the 2006 calendar year:

- Installed or maintained **6** beaver wetland control devices
- Mowed or maintained **600** acres of grassland and cropland
- Cleared competing brush from **33.5** acres of wild apple trees
- Burned, brush-hogged or reclaimed **87** acres of old field habitat
- Restored **0.3** acres of stream bank by planting **75** trees
- Managed wetland levels on **883** acres of waterfowl habitat
- Maintained **723** waterfowl nest structures
- Installed **3** eagle or osprey nest structures
- Treated **30** acres to control invasive exotic plants
- Thinned saplings on **31.6** acres of future deer winter habitat
- Conducted **11** 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, bridges, and herbaceous openings. All revenue generated by the commercial sale of timber on WMAs is reinvested into the management or acquisition of these lands. Timber sale receipts from commercial forest management activities on WMAs have increased sharply in recent years.

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. An additional \$50,000 was appropriated in 2005. The RGS partnership and the capital appropriations have been productive, resulting in a dramatic increase in WMA timber harvests and noncommercial habitat management activities during FY05, FY06 and FY07 (Figure 1).



Lou Bushey

Department staff, including ecologists, a botanist, a zoologist, and data managers inventory and monitor rare plants and animals as well as invasive species on WMAs. They work with wildlife biologists and foresters to ensure the entire ecosystem is considered in long range planning and annual management projects.

Table 1 reports the commercial wildlife habitat management activities on WMAs in FY06. Variations in harvesting volumes across different regions of the state are a result of disparities in State-owned timber acreage and accessibility on WMAs, staffing levels, stand conditions, and work priorities. Table 2 indicates the acreage and minimum projected income for 20 timber harvests that were active, sold, or about to be sold on 15 WMAs in FY07.

**Table 1. Wildlife Habitat Timber Harvests on Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department WMAs FY06**

Management Activity	District I Springfield	District II Rutland	District III Barre	District IV Essex	District V St Johnsbury	State Totals
<b>Timber Harvest</b>						
Fee Acres Harvested	0	30	10	0	490.5	<b>530.5</b>
Board Feet (MBF)	0	29.14	75.08	0	508.5	<b>612.72</b>
Cords (#)	0	110	360	0	1,960	<b>2,430</b>
Program Income (\$)	\$1,500 <sup>b</sup>	\$2,779.00	\$11,732.4	0	\$172,224.91	<b>\$188,236.31</b>
Non-fee Acres Harvested <sup>a</sup>	150+	0	0	0	0	<b>150+</b>

<sup>a</sup>Timber rights privately owned

<sup>b</sup>Bid deposits

**Table 2. Timber Harvests Re-activated, Sold or Ready to Sell on Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department WMAs as of January 1, 2006**

District	Number of Sales	Acres Clearcut	Acres Selective Cut	Acres Total	Minimum Sale \$ Value*
1 - Springfield	5	128	55	183	\$99,226.00
2 - Rutland	2	82	22	104	\$15,730.00
3 - Barre	2	117	11	128	\$76,539.00
4 - Essex	2	104	56	160	\$79,061.00
5 - St. Johnsbury	9	885	166	1,051	\$415,347.00
<b>Totals</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>1,316</b>	<b>310</b>	<b>1,626</b>	<b>\$685,903.00</b>

\*Based on actual price of purchased sales or minimum acceptable bid for sales ready to sell. Revenues subject to winter operating conditions; total income may not be realized until June 30, 2009.



Paul Hamelin

Forest access roads and openings serve multiple roles on WMAs. They're used for habitat management including timber harvesting; they're seeded to provide nutritious sun-loving plants and insects for many animals; and they provide access for hunting, fishing, trapping, and wildlife viewing.



Paul Hamelin

Unfortunately, vehicle damage caused by using trucks and ATVs on closed roads, vandalism, trash dumping, and boundary trespass are common on WMAs, and consume resources that could be used to improve habitat for wildlife and facilities for visitors.