

VERMONT FISH & WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT

Wildlife Management Area Report



Agency of Natural Resources
Protect, Respect, Enjoy

2012 Annual Report

New for 2013 – Rule Governing Public Use of Department Lands

In 1911, the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department (VFWD), then known as the Vermont Fish and Game Commission, acquired the first wildlife management area (WMA), Sandbar WMA. Since then VFWD has acquired 89 WMAs distributed throughout Vermont that encompass 133,000 acres. WMAs are managed for fish and wildlife habitat conservation as well as to provide fish and wildlife based recreation opportunities for the public. These lands are important for the public's enjoyment of Vermont's wildlife. A recent survey conducted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service highlights that Vermont ranks second only to Alaska for public participation in fish and wildlife recreation. Interest in hunting, fishing and other wildlife-based activities remains important to Vermonters and others and WMAs provide outstanding opportunities to enjoy these time-honored pursuits.

Public interest in a myriad of activities on public land has grown across the decades, prompting need for new regulation. In 2012, the department worked with the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Board to adopt a new rule that would enhance wildlife management and public use of the WMAs and at the same time keep the department in compliance with federal funding restrictions. The new rule governing WMA use is similar to one created several years ago to govern public activities at fishing access areas; however this rule addresses public use and activities at WMAs, fish culture stations and conservation camps.

In essence, the Rule Governing Public Use of Department Land formalizes a long-standing process that balances protecting and managing habitat and species, providing high-quality wildlife-based recreation opportunities, and allowing other public uses (if they are determined to be compatible with the primary interests of VFWD's ownership). The new rule provides the department guidance as it works collaboratively with various user groups to avoid conflict and promote appropriate outdoor recreational activities.

The new rule establishes "authorized activities" that include hunting, fishing, trapping, fish and wildlife viewing and photography, among others. Importantly, the rule grants the Commissioner authority to allow certain "prohibited activities" on designated sites or corridors if it is determined that there will be no adverse impact on authorized activities or to the primary



In 2012 the VT Fish and Wildlife Board adopted a new rule which clarifies how people can use lands owned by the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department, and reinforces fish and wildlife-based recreation and conservation as management priorities. Photo: NWTF.com

purposes of the ownership. Prohibited activities established in the rule include recreational use of ATVs, snowmobiles, non-motorized cycling, horseback riding, rock climbing and other activities not considered wildlife-based or deemed incompatible with the purposes of VFWD ownership.

VFWD has worked with the Vermont Association of Snow Travelers (VAST), bike riders, horseback riders, rock climbers, hikers, research institutions and many others over the years to accommodate their interests and allow them to use VFWD lands where appropriate. This rule will not change that relationship. In fact, the rule codifies this long-standing process and makes clear how those activities will be addressed.

Moving forward, the department is working on a plan to implement the rule. New maps of WMAs are being created that depict existing trails and sites for otherwise restricted activities such as VAST trails and bike trails, among others. These maps will serve to officially designate sites and corridors for those activities and will be available on VFWD's website. Department land managers are working with the Law Enforcement Division to develop a timeline for enforcing the rule, recognizing that users will need time to absorb and understand the requirements and related process for designating sites and corridors for otherwise restricted activities. Educating people on how the rule will be implemented is the top priority. Second is working with various user groups to establish clear expectations for what

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BioFinder – A New Approach to Understanding Vermont’s Environment

During the past 18 months, the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) has spearheaded an effort to develop a Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping tool that helps conservation practitioners, planners, land managers and others engaged in land conservation explore the distribution and richness of Vermont’s natural heritage in a way that can inform land use decision-making and planning. This new tool, known as BioFinder, is the product of a science-based collaboration with numerous conservation organizations including U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, The Nature Conservancy, Vermont Audubon and Vermont Land Trust, among others. Some of the 21 datasets used to develop this tool include habitat blocks, natural communities, important wildlife habitat, linkage habitat, aquatics and more. The data cover in breadth the various scales of Vermont’s ecosystems ranging from large landscapes (habitat blocks and connecting lands) to localized species such as locations and habitats for rare species.

BioFinder is now available on ANR’s website at: <http://biofinder.vermont.gov/>. The mapping tool is being used



The new BioFinder mapping tool developed by VT ANR allows land managers to quickly assess the high-priority attributes of a parcel proposed for acquisition.

useful perspective to land managers by putting state lands into a larger perspective within a broader landscape. As ANR develops strategies to adapt to climate change and its attendant effects on natural resources, BioFinder provides useful information on important areas of land that connect large habitat blocks. These corridors allow the movement of wide-ranging wildlife such as black bear, bobcat, otter and others. By assisting in this work and other projects, BioFinder will contribute to understanding Vermont’s rich natural heritage and to making important conservation decisions.

For more information on BioFinder, please visit ANR’s website at the link above.

Land Acquisition

WMA land acquisition is an important element in achieving the VFWD’s mission. Parcels are evaluated based on existing habitat values and restoration potential, rare or exemplary natural communities, and public access values for wildlife-based recreation on land or water. Other parcels are acquired to improve access to existing WMAs or to ensure that existing values are not compromised by adjacent development.

The department acquires WMA land with assistance from the ANR lands administration staff. Many land acquisition projects are made possible with the aid of conservation partners, notably Vermont Land Trust Inc., The Nature Conservancy, Ducks Unlimited and the Trust for Public Land. The acquisition process is quite lengthy and comprehensive, involving assessment of attributes, real estate appraisal, property survey, town approval, funding approval, ANR and Governor approval, and other administrative procedures. Thus, only a small proportion of potential parcels considered meet all of the criteria and are actually acquired.

A total of 10 parcels ranging in size from 3 to 2,865 acres are currently under consideration and in various stages of VFWD acquisition. The department anticipates closing on at least five of these properties in 2013. VFWD fee acquired nine parcels in 2012 totaling 1,278.9 acres:

Wenlock WMA, Ferdinand, VT, 410 ac. acquired - 2,403 ac. total

The department acquired 410 acres in Ferdinand in March 2012 and added it to the Wenlock WMA. This property contains significant wildlife habitat, and enhances public and management access. The parcel is mostly forested, containing important deer wintering habitat that abuts the Wenlock WMA. The land also contains frontage on Mile Pond and the Nulhegan River. Significant wetlands are found throughout the new property, providing added habitat diversity to the WMA.

Mallets Creek WMA, Colchester, VT, 120 ac. acquired - 147 ac. total

The department acquired this 120-acre piece of property in Colchester in March 2012 and added it to the Mallets Creek WMA. The parcel was the largest privately owned wetland remaining on Lake Champlain in Vermont. It includes excellent waterfowl habitat and ensures public access to the wetland.

Turner Hill WMA, Athens & Grafton, VT, 190 ac. acquired

The department and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) have been working to protect 560 acres as a new WMA in which numerous beaver-influenced wetlands provide ideal habitat for the federally endangered Northeastern bulrush (*Scirpus ancistrochaetus*). The Turner Hill WMA located in the towns of Athens and Grafton comprises undeveloped and intact forest land that supports vital wildlife habitat, state-significant wetlands, stream frontage, traditional recreational opportunities and scenic viewpoints.



Turner Hill WMA features undeveloped and intact forest land that supports vital wildlife habitat, state-significant wetlands, stream frontage, traditional recreational opportunities and scenic viewpoints. Photo: Tom Rogers

This wetland complex includes two documented occurrences of Northeastern bulrush and supports numerous wetlands that contain ideal habitat for the Northeastern bulrush. In December 2011, VFWD acquired the 78.77-acre Wright Estate property from The Nature Conservancy, and in May 2012, VFWD closed on the 190-acre Bemis property, the second of the three parcels which make up this new 560-acre WMA. VFWD anticipates closing on the final parcel, 291 acres, in March 2013.

South Bay WMA, Coventry, VT, 6.7 ac. and 47 ac. acquired - 1,867 ac. total

South Bay WMA is located in the northern part of Vermont's Northeast Kingdom. A diverse mosaic of wetlands dominates the WMA. These include extensive red maple–northern white cedar swamps, sweet gale–buttonbush shrub swamps, riverine floodplain forests, sedge meadows, cattail marshes, and bulrush–bur-reed marshes in deeper water.

VFWD closed on the Nadeau and Bouffard acquisitions in 2012. The department collaborated with Ducks Unlimited to acquire the 6.7-acre Bouffard parcel, which contains significant public recreation assets, wildlife habitat and ecological values. The parcel includes approximately 900 feet of frontage on the Black River adjacent to the WMA. The Nadeau acquisition consisted of two parcels totaling 47 acres that contain important public access and recreation assets, wildlife habitat and ecological values. Acquiring these parcels, along with Bouffard, nearly completes a contiguous state ownership of hunting rights on the west bank of the Black River from South Bay of Lake Memphremagog to Coventry Village.

Johnson Farm WMA, Canaan and Lemington, VT, 266 ac. and 17 ac. acquired

The department collaborated with the Vermont Land Trust (VLT) and TNC to permanently protect a large dairy farm along the upper Connecticut River. The property is known as the Johnson Farm and encompasses 1,023 acres along more than 6 miles of river shoreline in Canaan and Lemington. The Johnson Farm is notable for significant habitat diversity, long and scenic Connecticut River frontage and abundance of important natural features. The large, productive and well-known dairy farm on the property also plays an important role in the local economy.

The agricultural lands are interspersed with high-quality oxbow wetlands, scrub-shrub swamps, emergent marshes and floodplain forests. In addition to natural heritage and agricultural values, the Johnson property holds great recreational appeal, and is treasured locally for duck hunting and fishing.

The department worked collaboratively with TNC and VLT to determine the boundaries of the area that would come to the state. The WMA's 266 acres comprises the majority of the high-quality oxbow ponds, shrub-scrub swamps, emergent marshes, and floodplain forests located on the property. This configuration also includes an additional 100 acres that are currently farmland that will be restored after acquisition to wetland or buffer.

Soon after closing on the new Johnson Farm WMA, VFWD had the opportunity to add a 17-acre inholding. The parcel includes approximately 3 acres along the road that are open or developed. The remaining +/- 14 acres consists of a tamarack swamp, which is listed in the Essex County Nongame and Natural Heritage Inventory. This swamp was formed in an old oxbow of the Connecticut River and is in good condition although at present is flooded by beaver activity. The parcel is centrally located and surrounded on three sides by the Johnson Farm WMA. In addition to the natural resources on the property, it has abundant frontage along Route 102. Because other portions of the Johnson Farm WMA have only short access points along Route 102, this addition provides a central point of access, as well as an ideal location for signage for the WMA.

Mud Creek WMA, Alburg, VT, 148.9 ac. acquired - 1,300 ac. total

The department and TNC partnered to conserve the Crosby parcel. It connects two separate units of the Mud Creek WMA and protects a 4-mile contiguous stretch of wetland from Ransoms

Bay of Lake Champlain to the Canadian border. The tract also connects with 1,000 acres of conserved land on the Quebec side of the border. Acquiring this 148.9-acre parcel culminates 17 years of conservation effort.



VFWD Waterfowl Biologist Bill Crenshaw (retired) marks a boundary corner survey pin on the Crosby parcel addition to Mud Creek WMA. Photo: Jon Binhammer, TNC

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Non-commercial Wildlife Habitat Management

In noncommercial fish and wildlife habitat management activities, the habitat is enhanced through methods other than standard timber harvest contracts. In most cases, VFWD wildlife biologists, other Agency of Natural Resources staff, volunteers or private contractors perform these management activities.

The following noncommercial habitat management activities were conducted during the 2012 calendar year:

- Installed or maintained **13** beaver wetland devices
- Mowed or maintained **998 acres** of grassland and cropland
- Cleared competing brush from **255** fruit trees plus **5 acres** of apples and young oak trees
- Burned **68 acres** and reclaimed or brush-mowed **57 acres** to maintain **125 acres** of old field habitat
- Planted **647** trees for stream bank and Champlain Islands restoration
- Planted **6 acres** of herbaceous forage
- Managed water levels on **44 acres** and restored **15 acres** of wetland habitat for waterfowl and other wetland species
- Maintained **662** waterfowl, kestrel and bluebird nest structures and installed **33** new ones
- Installed **2** osprey nesting platforms
- Installed **3** levels of protective fencing (ground cover mesh, electric, perimeter) to protect nesting spiny soft-shell turtle nests
- Treated **11.6 acres** and removed an additional **300** invasive plants
- Conducted **55** habitat, wildlife or public use inventories on **30** WMAs



In 2012 intensive management efforts at a Lake Champlain WMA produced 535 spiny soft-shell turtle hatchlings from 53 nests, a significant step towards recovery of this state-threatened species. Photo: Lawrence Pyne

Commercial Wildlife Habitat Management

Commercial wildlife habitat management activities can enhance wildlife habitat while removing merchantable wood products or agricultural crops. Commercial logging operations also improve public access for fish- and wildlife- based activities by helping the VFWD develop or maintain WMA roads, culverts, bridges and herbaceous openings. Revenue generated by the commercial sale of timber and hay on WMAs is reinvested into the management or acquisition of these lands. Timber sale receipts from commercial forest management activities on WMAs have increased slightly in recent years, although the vagaries of the timber markets as well as completion of many timber harvests on WMAs throughout the state cause an ebb and flow of these revenues.

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

The 2004 Legislature appropriated \$40,000 in capital funds to the VFWD to facilitate these activities. An additional \$50,000 was appropriated in 2005. The RGS partnership and the capital appropriations were very productive, resulting in a dramatic increase in WMA timber harvests and noncommercial habitat management activities during FY05 through FY11. A summary of WMA timber harvests for the 5-year period FY08 to FY12 is provided in Table 1.

Table 2 reports the commercial wildlife habitat management activities on WMAs in FY12. Variations in harvesting volumes across different regions of the state are caused by disparities in state-owned timber acreage and accessibility on WMAs, staffing levels, stand conditions and work priorities. Table 3 indicates the acreage and minimum projected income for 10 timber harvests that were active, sold, or about to be sold on 10 WMAs as of January 1, 2013.

Commercial agriculture was conducted via leases on 793 acres in four districts in 2012, generating \$10,527 in revenue. As with timber harvesting, this activity contributes to the local economy and maintains Vermont's working landscape while providing habitat elements for many species of greatest conservation need as well as waterfowl, deer, bear, turkeys and small game.



Carefully prescribed timber harvesting on WMAs maintains habitat for young forest wildlife such as deer, ruffed grouse and rabbits, which are the prey of many wild predators as well as game for hunters. Photo: Kristen Sharpless, VT Audubon

Table 1. Wildlife Habitat Timber Harvests on VFWD WMAs FY08-12^a

	FY08	FY09	FY10	FY11	FY12	5-Year Totals
Fee Acres Harvested (#)	659	624	565	404	244	2,496
Board Feet (MBF)	891	992	782	739	380	3,784
Cords (#)	3,008	3,477	1,939	3,215	1,722	13,361
Program Income (\$) ^c	\$294,582	\$268,200	\$205,193	\$200,748	\$107,135	\$1,075,858
Non-fee Acres Harvest (#) ^b	105	300	500	700	200	1,805
# of Active Timber Sales	12	11	8	14	9	N/A: Timber Harvests Span Several Years

Table 2. Wildlife Habitat Timber Harvests on VFWD WMAs - FY12^a

	District I Springfield	District II Rutland	District III Barre	District IV Essex Jct.	District V St. Johnsbury	State Totals
Fee Acres Harvested (#)	18	106	0	82	38	244
Board Feet (MBF)	50	174	0	124	32	380
Cords (#)	400	605	0	390	327	1,722
Program Income (\$) ^c	\$3,355	\$37,904	\$0	\$42,482	\$23,394	\$107,135
Non-fee Acres Harvested (#) ^b	200	0	0	0	0	200

^a Includes pre-harvest payments; ^b Timber rights privately owned; ^c Revenues generated on WMAs go back into the management of these properties.

Table 3. Wildlife Habitat Timber Harvests Active, Sold, or Ready to Sell on Ten VFWD WMAs as of Jan. 1, 2013

District	Number of Sales	Clear-Cut Acres	Selective Acres	Acres Total	Income Projection*
Springfield	3	21	103	124	\$52,600
Rutland	3	10	117	127	\$72,661
Barre	2	5	272	277	\$112,512
Essex	1	0	41	41	\$21,241
St. Johnsbury	1	0	50	50	\$18,180
Totals	10	36	583	619	\$277,194

*Based on actual price of purchased sales or minimum acceptable bid for sales ready to sell. Projection = payment amount remaining in active sales + uncut sold sales + prospectus minimum bids. Revenue subject to winter operating conditions; total income may not be realized until after June 30, 2015.



VFWD Fisheries Biologists used nets and electrofishing gear to investigate the fish populations in the beaver pond and two streams at Atherton Meadows WMA.
Photo: Lael Will



The success of water level management to enhance wetland plant productivity at Dead Creek WMA was evident in the numbers of waterfowl and wading birds using the revitalized habitat.
Photo: David Sausville

In the Spotlight: West Mountain WMA

West Mountain WMA is a 22,971-acre parcel of land managed by the VFWD. Located in the towns of Maidstone, Ferdinand and Brunswick, the WMA ranges north from Maidstone Lake to Route 105, and east from South America Pond to the Connecticut River. Access is available along miles of dirt roads. Main entry points are South America Pond Road off Route 105, Maidstone Lake Road, and Paul Stream Road off Route 102.

Although most of Vermont was cleared for agriculture and dotted with farmsteads by the mid-19th century, this region of the state remained relatively wild and forested through the early 20th century. Relatively poor soils, abundant glacial deposits of boulders and gravel, and severe climate due to elevation and topography combined to make the region unfavorable for farming. Landowner interests in the area have focused on timber harvesting since the early days of settlement. Logging on the WMA land began in 1800 when the town of Brunswick issued a 400-acre “pitch” on Paul Stream to Ithiel Cargill. A large mill and small village were located further up Paul Stream at Brown’s Mill. In 1900, the Connecticut Valley Lumber Company (CVL) moved its headquarters from Pittsburg, N.H., to Bloomfield, Vt., after the discovery that the old-growth spruce south of the Nulhegan River was dying due to an infestation of spruce bark beetle.



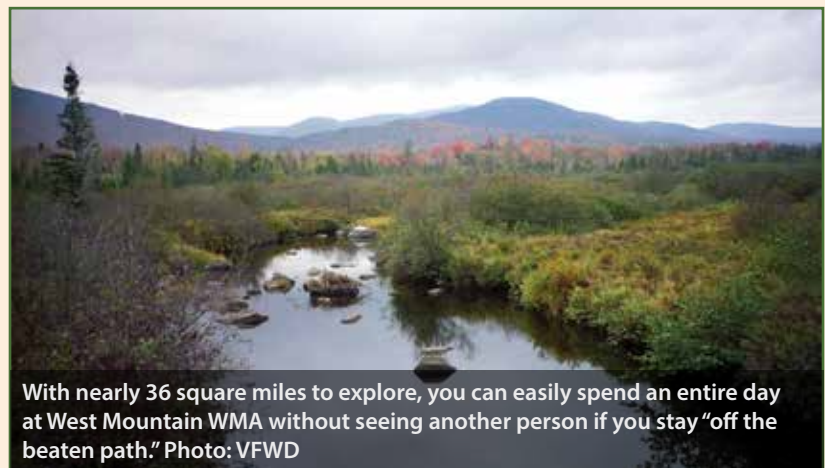
Historic logging camps and the camp culture persist at West Mountain WMA. Photo: VT ANR

Logging camps and “driving” dams were built throughout the Paul Stream Valley. CVL woodsmen at Bull’s Throat camp and dam (located $\frac{3}{4}$ mile up Paul Stream from the outlet of Maidstone Brook) spent the winter of 1914–15 cutting spruce and hauling it by horse and sled to the banks of Paul Stream to await the spring drive. In the spring of 1915, 500 CVL loggers brought 65 million board feet of timber, harvested throughout the Connecticut River Valley, down the Connecticut River to Mt. Tom, Mass. Private timber companies owned the land throughout the 20th century. Champion International purchased the land in 1985 and continued to allow public access for traditional uses such as hunting, fishing, trapping and snowmobiling. In fact, during the past century, camps originally built for logging have been used as bases for hunting, fishing, and trapping. Champion International authorized additional camp leases when it owned the land. Many are still located in this region of Vermont and the “camp culture” still thrives across northern New England and New York. In August 1999, the land was purchased from

Champion International with funds from the Richard King Mellon Foundation as part of a large-scale land conservation partnership of state, federal and private organizations. The Vermont General Assembly appropriated \$4.5 million for the purchase of a public-access easement on 86,000 acres of land surrounding the West Mountain WMA. Under state ownership, the 65 existing camp leases are allowed to continue, but no new leases will be authorized.

Elevations on the WMA range from 2,733 feet on West Mountain to 1,100 feet along the lower stretches of Paul Stream. The terrain varies from high-elevation spruce-fir to lowland bogs. The department has identified 14 species of plants listed as rare or endangered and eight sites of ecological significance on the WMA. Black bears thrive in the heavily forested habitat of the WMA. The property has also been core habitat for moose production in Vermont and contains some of the state’s highest densities of moose due to intensive timber management during the past 30 years.

Timber harvests have created ideal habitat for snowshoe hare and ruffed grouse. Signs of fisher, coyote, fox, bobcat and porcupine are commonly seen on the WMA, and beavers inhabit many of the streams and maintain habitat for many other species including mink, weasel, raccoon and river otter. The variety of forests and wetlands provides habitat for neotropical migratory birds. Extensive tracts of both hardwood and softwood forest offer nesting habitat for many species that are experiencing population declines due to habitat fragmentation and loss throughout their range. The large stands of spruce-fir provide critical habitat for boreal species such as the gray jay, black-backed woodpecker, boreal chickadee and bay-breasted warbler.



With nearly 36 square miles to explore, you can easily spend an entire day at West Mountain WMA without seeing another person if you stay “off the beaten path.” Photo: VFWD

West Mountain WMA contains nine major ponds, more than 75 miles of streams and many diverse wetland complexes. The many ponds, streams and beaver impoundments provide habitat for nesting and migrating waterfowl, including goldeneyes, ring-neck ducks, common and hooded mergansers as well as black, wood and mallard ducks. Common loons nest on Maidstone Lake and West Mountain Pond, and ospreys also nest in the vicinity of these two water bodies.

Dennis, Paul Stream, Little Wheeler and Turtle Ponds are shallow ponds containing warmwater species such as brown bullhead, chain pickerel and yellow perch, while South America, Notch, West Mountain, Unknown and Wheeler Ponds are deeper ponds containing brook trout. Paul, Granby and Wheeler Streams all support populations of wild brook trout. Mink frogs, painted and snapping turtles may be found in the larger ponds across the WMA, and chorus frogs, such as the spring peeper, can be heard singing from vernal pools in early spring.

When the property became a WMA in 1999, the first priority was to draft a management plan to guide the implementation of habitat and recreation projects. Much has been accomplished since the plan was approved in 2002, including:

- Sixty acres of precommercial thinning of softwood stands to accelerate growth for winter deer shelter;
- Ten timber harvests totaling 999 acres, including three sets of ruffed grouse habitat management units in which a total of 72 acres were harvested in 3-5 acres patches in a checkerboard pattern;
- Two openings totaling 19 acres are burned on a 3-year rotation to maintain herbaceous forbs and wild blueberry production;
- Two designated camping areas have been installed to accommodate equestrian and other uses;
- A viewing platform was constructed to provide visitors a sheltered, universal access site to observe moose off Notch Pond Road/Route 105;
- Eight beaver baffle devices have been installed and maintained to retain valuable wetlands while mitigating conflicts with roads;
- Nearly all bridges were re-decked by FPR staff within 2 years of state ownership;
- Significant funds (about \$25,000) are spent on road maintenance annually—to repair damage from a spring storm and Tropical storm Irene in 2011, \$50,000 was spent; and
- Two in-holdings totaling 239 acres were acquired and added to the WMA.



Pre-commercial thinning was used to accelerate conifer growth on 60 acres that will provide winter shelter for deer more quickly than an un-thinned stand. Photo: Paul Hamelin

Property Administration

Maintaining the property's boundaries and infrastructure, such as roads, bridges and signs, is an essential component of any land management program. Without these efforts, the habitat management and public use goals of each area may be unachievable. The 89 WMAs routinely require boundary line surveying and maintenance, building maintenance, signage, trash removal, and responses to encroachments and other trespasses.

The following activities were completed on WMAs during the 2012 calendar year:

- Installed or repaired **12** culverts or bridges
- Constructed **3** new parking areas
- Maintained **5** buildings
- Mowed/maintained **32** dams, rebuilt **1** dam, restored a wetland by installing **1** ditch plug
- Maintained **21** miles of forest roads
- Maintained or removed **3,200** feet of fence
- Removed **8** tons of refuse from 1 WMA
- Improved/maintained **20** parking areas
- Installed **5** signs, **4** new kiosks, and maintained **37** existing kiosks
- Installed **2** birding trails and **1** viewing platform
- Maintained **30** miles of property boundary and surveyed **13** boundary miles
- Installed **4** new gates and repaired **3**
- Conducted **37** cultural resource reviews
- Assessed **17** parcels for potential VFWD acquisition to protect habitat and public access for wildlife-based recreation
- Addressed **114** property administration issues (encroachments, permits and so on)
- Conducted **30** presentations or media releases
- Hosted **2** public input meetings and finalized **2** long-range management plans
- Hosted the 11th Annual Dead Creek Wildlife Day featuring numerous wildlife-based activities at Dead Creek WMA



Volunteers from the Memphremagog Watershed Association (VT) and Memphremagog Conservation Inc. (Que.) removed more than 8 tons of refuse and yard debris from Eagle Point WMA. Photo: Paul Hamelin

Rule Governing Public Use of Land *continued from page 1*

activities will be accommodated and how they will be managed. The department views this process as an opportunity to partner with various fish and wildlife constituents and the broader public. VFWD looks forward to working together for the conservation and enjoyment of Vermont's fish and wildlife.

The new rule can be found at:
www.vtfishandwildlife.com/laws_rules.cfm

WMA Administration and Management

The department has purchased WMAs using several funding sources, including funds from hunting license sales, Vermont Waterfowl Funds from the sale of state duck stamps, U.S. Fish and 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. Each year, at least 17 VFWD biologists work on WMA management and administration.

Technical assistance from the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and 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 noncommercial means to provide a rich diversity of habitat types and forest ages necessary to meet the needs of many wildlife species.

The management of WMAs is guided by long-range management plans, which are based on a natural resources inventory and public input gathered through various methods. 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.

WMAs are popular wildlife-based recreation destinations. Installing infrastructures like this boardwalk at Moose Bog, Wenlock WMA let the public enjoy the WMA while protecting fragile habitat. Photo: Paul Hamelin



Land Acquisition *continued from page 2*

Lemon Fair WMA, Bridport, VT, 73.3 ac. acquired - 414 ac. total

Located in Bridport, the Lemon Fair WMA is one of the newest VFWD projects. Its development began in 2000 and, to date, all funding for this WMA has come from the State Waterfowl Funds, generated by the sale of the Vermont Duck Stamp. The Payne property has a Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) conservation easement on it held by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The main goal of WRP easements is to restore the degraded wetlands on the property. NRCS also completed a wetland restoration plan for the property as part of the project. Of particular benefit to VFWD, these easements strip away the majority of the value from the property making it very affordable for VFWD to acquire. However, they do not protect public access, which was one reason why VFWD acquired the Payne property. The parcel also connects two previously conserved parcels along the Lemon Fair River.

Landowner Incentive Program Conservation Easements, 891 ac. conserved

The Landowner Incentive Program (LIP) was a competitive grant program funded by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, administered in Vermont by VFWD between 2006 and 2012. The program provided financial incentives to private landowners in exchange for long-term habitat protection and stewardship of rare, threatened and endangered species and natural communities, also known as species-at-risk. These included federal and state listed plants and animals, wildlife and habitats at risk, and exemplary natural communities tracked by the VFWD. In Vermont, LIP funds were used to initiate a landowner incentive program that offered a variety of tools to landowners for conservation, including funds for conservation easements and cooperative management agreements.

The conservation easement is a legal document designed to permanently protect the natural condition of property by limiting the type and scope of development that can take place. All easements allow lands to remain in the landowner's hands and on local tax rolls while providing such public benefits as natural areas, scenic vistas and wildlife habitat for future generations. The easements help landowners to conserve important aspects of their community and contribute to the region's quality of life. In some cases, easements may permit farming and forestry activities to continue. Under the LIP Program VFWD acquired eight conservation easements totaling 1,576 acres. In 2012 VFWD closed on three of the easements which totaled 891 acres.



Most of the programs described in this report are funded through the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Program. This program was initiated in 1937 as the Federal Aid in Wildlife Act and created a system whereby taxes are paid on firearms, ammunition and archery equipment by the public who hunts. Today this excise tax generates more than one hundred million dollars each year that are dedicated to state wildlife restoration and management projects across the United States. The state of Vermont uses these monies for acquiring land, and for restoring and managing wildlife. These excise tax dollars, coupled with state hunting license fees, have been the predominant source of funding for the successful restoration and management of Vermont's wildlife resources.