



Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department Land Conservation and Management Annual Report – 2021

The Mission of the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department is to **Protect and Conserve** our **Fish, Wildlife, Plants** and their **Habitats** for the **People of Vermont**.

Windsor Grasslands WMA, Windsor

The period covered by this report was impacted by the challenges and opportunities resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic. Safety protocols to minimize the spread of the disease mandated the closure of offices, businesses, restaurants and essentially any place people gathered to work or socialize. Mirroring a trend observed nationwide, Vermonters isolated at home turned to the solace of the outdoors to recreate and experience the mental and physical benefits proven to be gained from time spent outdoors in nature.

Public lands everywhere, including Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs), hosted an unprecedented surge of new users and an increase in traditional users re-engaging in wildlife-based recreation. WMA managers quickly adapted to teleworking tools to maintain vital functions and stepped up to the challenge of managing overflowing parking areas, traditional and new user conflicts, and increased information requests.

The pandemic also presented unprecedented opportunities with a substantial influx of federal funding to increase public access to outdoor recreation. The federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and

Economic Security Act, (CARES Act) was a \$2.2 trillion economic stimulus bill passed by the 116th U.S. Congress. Funding was disbursed to states for a variety of economic stimulus work, resulting in \$626,000 designated for infrastructure improvements to enhance public access on Fish & Wildlife lands. The funding had to be spent on a short timeline, requiring all department land management staff to pause many ongoing projects and dedicate their efforts to implementing CARES Act funded projects. The funding was used to upgrade fishing access areas facilities, substantially improve WMA roads and parking areas, and install new parking areas, paddle craft access sites, and trails.

The Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department (VFWD) manages department lands with a focus on the conservation of fish, wildlife and their habitats, as well as public access for hunting, fishing, trapping, wildlife viewing and photography, and other wildlife-dependent activities. These lands offer unique opportunities to enjoy and appreciate fish, wildlife and nature because they have no extensive networks of trails and other infrastructure and instead give people the opportunity to connect to the land through dispersed access.

Protect and Conserve...

The following activities were conducted to protect and conserve these valuable properties:

- 97 acres received invasive plant control measures
- 11 miles of boundary lines were maintained
- 2 beaver wetland devices were installed/maintained
- 9 gates were installed or maintained
- 1,732 acres of wetlands were managed to enhance wildlife habitat

our Fish, Wildlife, Plants...

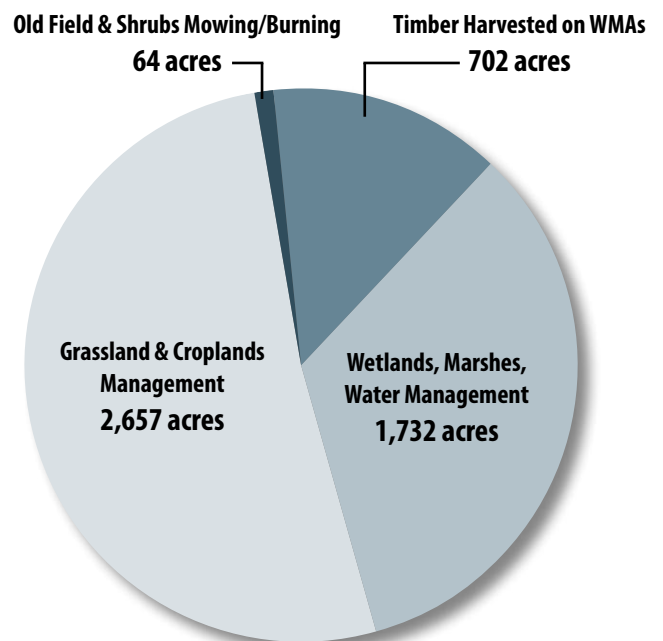
- 48 inventories of wildlife, fish, plants and natural communities were conducted on WMAs by VFWD staff

and their Habitats...

The following activities were conducted to enhance wildlife habitat on VFWD lands statewide:

- 27 dams were maintained to manage the associated wetland acres
- 488 nesting boxes for ducks were maintained
- 5,000 trees were planted to restore riverbank habitat
- 18 acres of herbaceous forage were planted
- 2.5 acres of wild fruit and nut trees were maintained

5,155 Acres of Habitat Managed





...for the People of Vermont.

Maintaining facilities and infrastructure such as roads, bridges, and signs is essential to achieve the habitat management and public use goals of VFWD lands. The following activities were conducted to improve Vermonter's experience when visiting the properties:

SIGNAGE

- **19** information kiosks were maintained

FACILITIES

- **3** buildings were maintained
- **4** new parking areas were installed
- **43** parking areas were maintained

PLANNING

- **18** articles published and/or public events hosted
- **3** cultural resource assessments were conducted
- **1** Long-Range Management Plan was approved

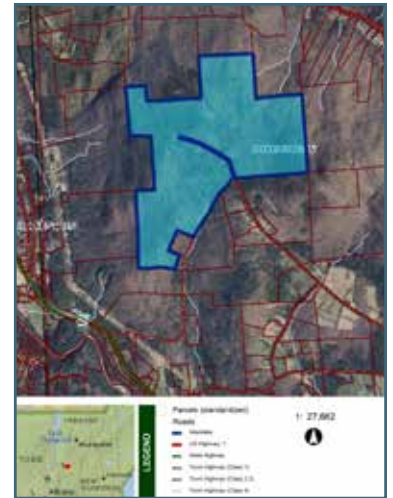
ACCESS

- **1.5** miles of trails were maintained
- **44** miles of roads were maintained
- **23** culverts and bridges were installed
- **7** paddler access stair sites were installed
- **10** meetings with landowners were held to discuss purchasing land to expand river and stream access

Other program activities benefiting all Vermonters include:

LAND ACQUISITION

Public opinion surveys continue to highlight the importance of public land, and land specifically owned by the VFWD, to their outdoor recreation interests. The department closed on seven land acquisitions in 2021, including establishing the 100th WMA on the 100-year anniversary of WMA ownership in Vermont. The newest WMA, located in the town of Shrewsbury, Vermont is the Town Farm WMA. In total, VFWD added 1,660 acres of important fish and wildlife habitat to the WMA system.



Town Farm WMA

Other projects included expansions to Roaring Brook WMA in Vernon, Lemon Fair WMA in Weybridge, Black Creek WMA in St. Albans, Rock River WMA in Highgate, East Creek WMA in Orwell, and Dead Creek WMA in Addison. VFWD encourages people to enjoy time outdoors on these special areas.

HABITAT STAMP

Your Vermont Habitat Stamp contributes directly to conserving and improving Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department lands. Everyone can donate! It's easy at our website: vtfishandwildlife.com/vthabitatstamp



Wildlife Habitat Timber Harvests on Department Lands State Fiscal Years 2017-2021						
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	5 YEAR TOTALS
Fee acres harvested	164	155	204	189	412	1,124
Board Feet (MBF)	225	304	817	483	911	2,740
Cords	1,589	718	994	712	3,081	7,094
Non-fee acres harvested	0	575	150	275	290	1,290
# Active Timber Harvests	4	8	7	6	2	N/A

PROGRAM PARTNERS

Most of the projects described in this report are funded through the Federal Aid in Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program. Excise taxes paid by hunters and anglers on firearms, ammunition, archery, and fishing equipment, coupled with state hunting and fishing license fees, have helped the department acquire land, and restore and manage fish and wildlife since 1937.

Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation, Wildlife Management Institute, Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation, The Vermont Chapter of The Nature Conservancy, National Wild Turkey Federation, and Audubon Vermont further supported habitat improvements on VFWD lands in 2021.

