

Little Otter Creek Wildlife Management Area

General Description

Little Otter Creek Wildlife Management Area (WMA) is located in west central Vermont in the town of Ferrisburg near Lake Champlain. The State of Vermont owns 1,438 acres near the mouth of the Creek. The property is managed by the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department.

Access by boat is via the put-in on Hawkins Road near the causeway, or from the mouth of the Creek in Hawkins Bay. One can get to Hawkins Bay from the boat access near the mouth of Lewis Creek off Long Point Road. One can gain access to the South Slang part of the WMA by walking in from Hawkins Road. To get to the eastern side of the WMA, use a gated road at the south end of Greenbush Road. The gate is open some of the time for hunting, but otherwise is only for walk-in access. Please be careful when crossing the railroad tracks.

History

From remains along Otter Creek, it is evident that the Archaic Indians hunted small game, collected nuts, berries and roots, and fished in this area. Later there were permanent Abenaki, and possibly Iroquois, summer settlements along Otter Creek and the shores of Lake Champlain, where they hunted, fished and grew crops. They named the Creek "little river abode of otters." These people moved to the mountains during the winter months to hunt.

Since European settlement, farming has been the main land use in the Champlain Valley. The Hawkins family has owned and farmed much of the land surrounding Little Otter Creek for several generations.

The first purchase for the WMA was made in 1951. Some of the land was acquired from the Hawkins family. The State also acquired parcels from several other landowners. Dozens of purchases have been made over the years. Pittman-Robertson monies, which are generated from a tax on firearms and ammunition, provided much of the funding. State funds generated from hunting license sales were also used.

The Nature Conservancy and the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board assisted on the most recent purchases. Funding for these came from the North American Wetland Conservation Act and Ducks Unlimited. The Vermont Land Trust, Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, and The Nature Conservancy hold conservation easements on many acres of surrounding farmland.

Habitat Features

Little Otter Creek is a lowland river in the Champlain Basin with three major branches. The WMA is 60% wetland and the rest mostly upland forest, with a small amount of acreage in field. Near the mouth, the river's water level is naturally regulated by Lake Champlain, creating a rich diversity of aquatic plants. The upland forest is a mix of red maple, white ash, gray birch, red and white oak, shagbark hickory, white pine and hemlock.

Valley clayplain forest also occurs here. It is a remnant of this historically common forest type in the Lake Champlain Valley. Since so much of the Valley was cleared for agriculture, very little remains. It is adapted to grow in the fertile, but poorly drained, clay soils that are common in the Valley.

There are several rare plants in the WMA, including black gum trees, yellow bartonia, American hazelnut, cat-tail sedge, lake cress, false hop sedge, and the State-threatened Virginia chair-fern and marsh vetchling.

Common Fish and Wildlife

Mammals Species that are common on the WMA are white-tailed deer, cottontail rabbit and gray squirrel. Furbearers include beaver, mink, muskrat, otter, red and gray fox, raccoon and coyote.

Birds This is an excellent birding site for wetland species such as rails, pied-billed grebes, common moorhens, bitterns and herons. Rare least bitterns and black terns have been spotted here. Ospreys have several nests on the Creek. Upland game birds present are ruffed grouse, wild turkey and American woodcock. Many species of waterfowl both breed here and migrate through, including Canada geese, wood and black ducks, mallards, hooded mergansers, and green and blue-winged teal. There is also a full compliment of songbirds, especially those species that prefer to live near water.

Ospreys have several nests along Little Otter Creek. ©Jupiter Images 2004.



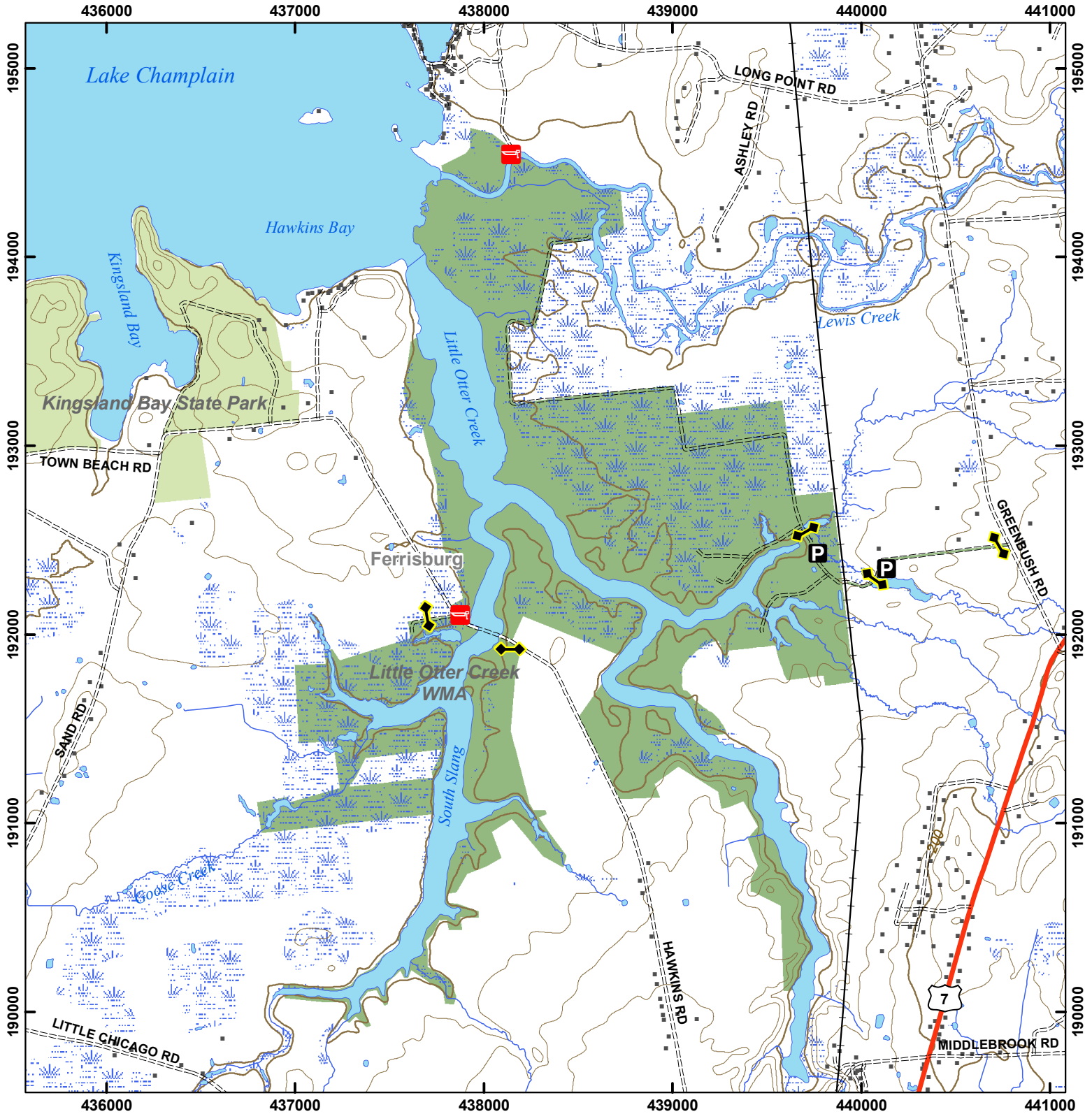
Reptiles and Amphibians As wetlands are good places to find amphibians and reptiles, this WMA supports a variety. Salamanders that may be present are blue-spotted, spotted, red-backed and northern two-lined salamanders, newts and mudpuppies. Green, pickerel, northern leopard, wood frogs, gray tree and bullfrogs may be found along with spring peepers. Turtle species may include snapping, painted and northern map turtles and stinkpots. Milk, northern water, brown and garter snakes may be present as well.

Fish There is good fishing along the lower Little Otter Creek for warmwater species such as smallmouth and largemouth bass, yellow perch, brown bullhead, northern pike, black crappie and chain pickerel. The brassy minnow is an uncommon small fish occurring here.

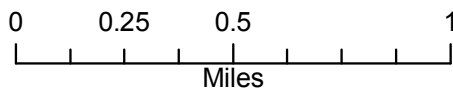


Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department

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Little Otter Creek WMA: 1,416 acres



- Wildlife Management Area
- Other Public Land
- Private w/ Public Access
- Wildlife Viewing Areas
- Car-top Access
- Parking
- Boat Ramp
- Gate
- Designated Camp Site During Big Game Seasons Only

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