

Otter Creek Wildlife Management Area

General Description

Otter Creek Wildlife Management Area (WMA) is a 1,139-acre tract that is owned by the State of Vermont and managed by the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department. It is located along the Mount Tabor-Danby town line in Rutland County. The vast majority, 1,036 acres, lies in the town of Mount Tabor, with the remaining 103 acres in Danby. The property consists of three parcels; two are located approximately one and one-half miles north of Danby. The other is one mile south of Danby.

There is an improved parking lot and a couple of pull-outs along Route 7 which provide access to the WMA.

History

Samuel de Champlain named Otter Creek “La Riviere aux Loutres” – “the river with otters”. Mohawk Indians called it “Dawinehneh” – “at the abode of the otters”, and an Abnaki name for the river meant “little river of otters”. The river has been known throughout history for its abundant river otters, and they are still present today.

Otter Creek WMA was formerly farm and pasture land. Most of the land was acquired in the mid-1960’s from several different owners, such as the Bakers, Nielsons, Crosbys and Griffiths. Over half of the WMA was acquired with Land and Water Conservation Funds (LWCF), while the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department funded the remaining acreage with funds generated from hunting license sales.

Habitat Features

The terrain of Otter Creek WMA is typical of the western foothills of the Green Mountains, ranging from relatively flat valley floor to extremely steep, rough, stony slopes. Otter Creek is the major watercourse that runs along the western boundary of the WMA. There are also several small feeder streams that traverse the parcel. The WMA lies within the Green Mountain physiographic region, which is known for severe climatic conditions. High temperature variation exists because of the difference in elevation and topography in the region.

About 70% of Otter Creek WMA is forested. In total, softwood stands comprise some 190 acres. Hemlock is the dominant cover type comprising 56% of the softwoods, followed by white pine at 44%. The forest also has red and sugar maple, yellow birch, beech, red oak and hickory. Approximately 260 acres of saturated scrub/shrub communities, open water and emergent aquatic vegetation are designated as wetlands.

Herbaceous upland accounts for the remaining 66 acres. Approximately one-third of the northernmost 234-acre parcel is deer wintering area, while over half of the middle parcel’s 815 acres are similarly designated. Management of at least portions of these deeryards has included commercial timber and firewood cuts to release hemlock, and also to establish openings to create browse for deer.

The entire southern parcel and the western third of the middle parcel have been classified as wetlands on the

Department of Interior’s Natural Wetlands Inventory maps. Hill’s pondweed, an aquatic plant preferring shallow, highly alkaline, muddy waters, was originally discovered in 1934 and again in 1982 close to if not within the WMA along Otter Creek. Hill’s pondweed was considered for federal listing as a threatened species at one time. It is considered to be uncommon by the Vermont Nongame and Natural Heritage Program of the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department. Please remember that plants should not be picked or removed, regardless of status.

Common Fish and Wildlife

Mammals The WMA’s 480 acres of deer wintering habitat is important for maintaining a healthy deer population. Black bears can be found foraging on the wide variety of food, from beechnuts to berries and grasses, which are available in this area. Moose are attracted to the succulent wetland vegetation and the cover that the surrounding woods provide. As the WMA’s name implies, otters, along with beaver, minks, raccoons and muskrats can be seen along Otter Creek and some of its feeder streams. Snowshoe hares, gray squirrels and other small mammals provide food for foxes, coyotes, fishers and bobcats.

Birds The diversity of hardwood and softwood forest types interspersed with herbaceous open areas provides habitat for numerous species of songbirds and raptors. This includes osprey, which can be seen along Otter Creek. The wetland complex associated with Otter Creek provides important habitat for a wide variety of waterfowl. The area affords good nesting habitat for wood, black and mallard ducks, teals and mergansers, as well as various shore birds. Woodcock are present in good numbers on the WMA, particularly in the alder swamps typical of the bottomlands along Otter Creek. Also associated with the brush lands along the Creek are fair numbers of ruffed grouse, which prefer early successional habitat.

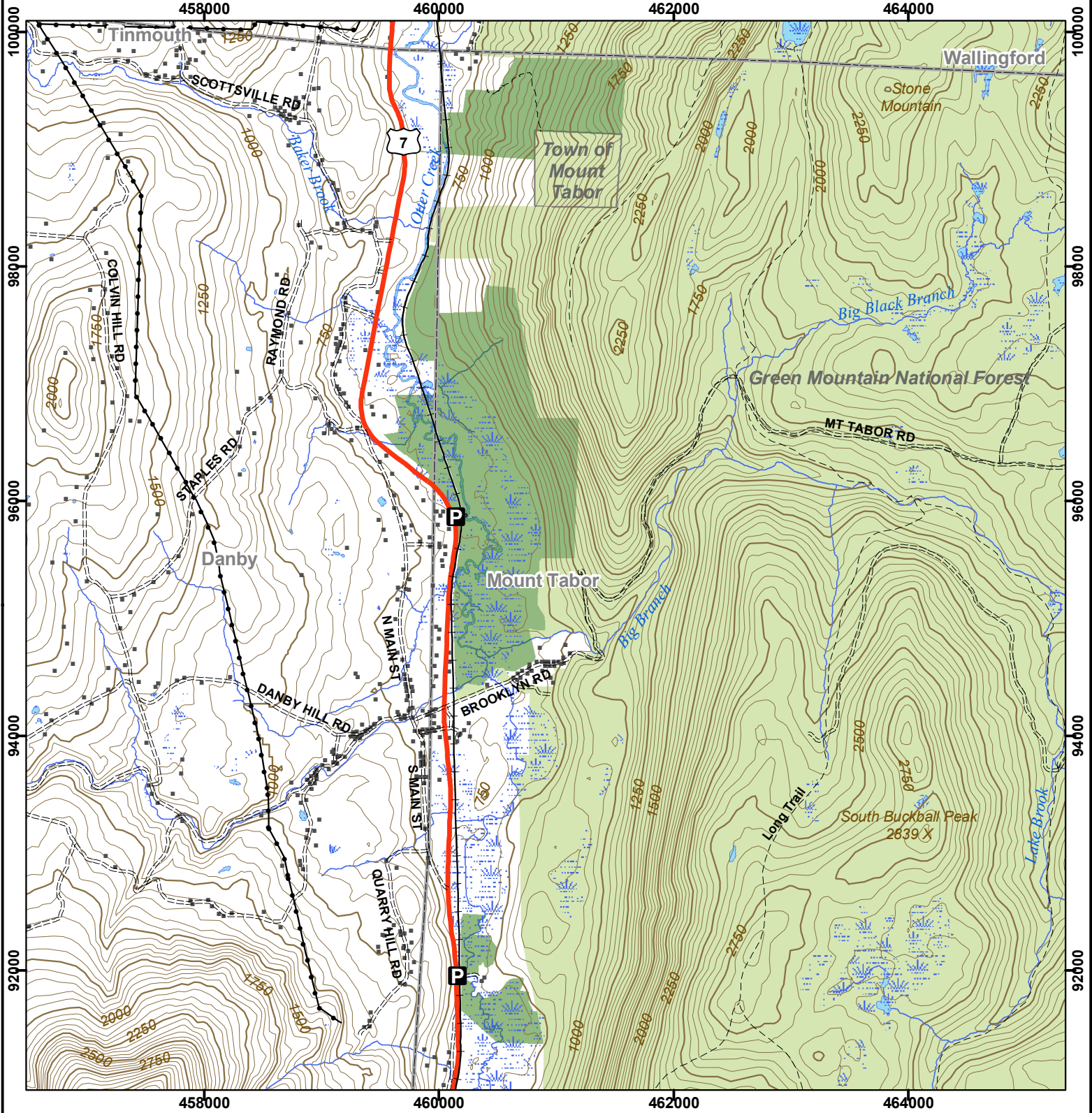
Reptiles and Amphibians Wood and green frogs, spring peepers and American toads can be heard singing from the wetlands and woodland vernal pools in the spring and summer. Salamanders, such as blue-spotted, spotted, northern dusky, northern two-lined, eastern red-backed and spring salamanders, can be found in the moister areas of the WMA. Along Otter Creek, snapping, painted and wood turtles may be seen sunning themselves. Snakes, such as the common garter and milk snake, are more elusive but also inhabit the area.

Fish Otter Creek is home to several species of fish. This high-quality habitat provided by the usually smooth-flowing Otter Creek supports brown, brook and rainbow trout. Smaller species that can be found in Otter Creek are longnose and blacknose dace, fathead and bluntnose minnows and spot-tail shiners.



Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department

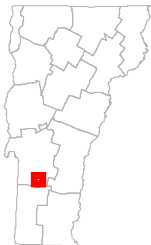
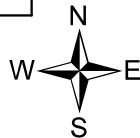
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Otter Creek WMA: 1,143 acres



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