



2019 Vermont Habitat Stamp Annual Report



Eric Sorenson

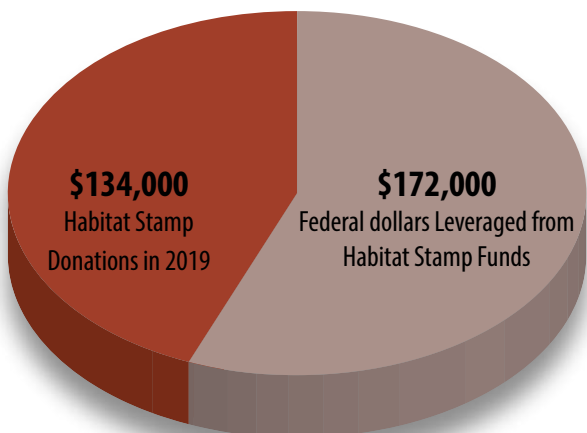
Quality habitat is essential for healthy fish and wildlife populations. In Vermont, the new Habitat Stamp is helping ensure all kinds of wildlife will exist for generations to come. This year's donations totaled \$134,000 and funded the establishment of a pollinator field in West Addison, habitat management on hundreds of acres of department lands and the restoration of miles of streambank throughout Vermont.

By The Numbers*

- 9,600 donations totaled **\$134,000** and earned **\$16,000** in interest
- **\$73,000** in Habitat Stamp funds were spent and were matched by an additional **\$172,000** in federal funds

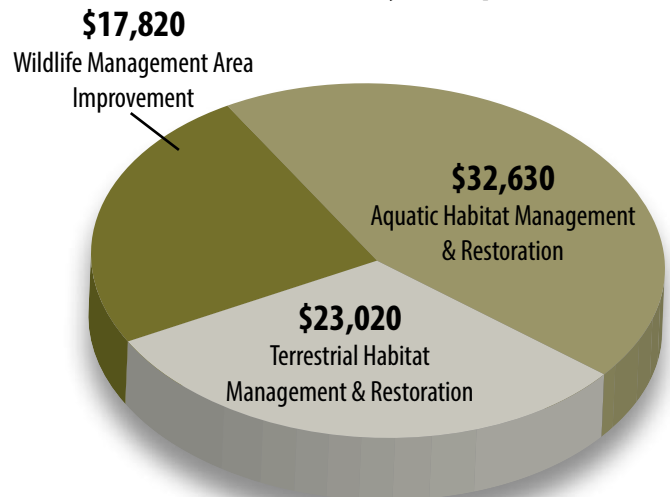
Total Conservation Funding: \$306,000

Where the Money Came From



Total Habitat Stamp Funds Spent: \$73,470**

How the Money Was Spent



* Dates are 12/01/18 through 11/30/19

** These figures only include Habitat Stamp fund expenditures, not federal funds.

The Birds...

Habitat biologist Andrea Shortsleeve works with private landowners and conservation partners to improve habitat for birds and other wildlife.

◆ Partnering in Conservation

Working with Audubon Vermont and other partners, Andrea recently started a project that will improve shrubland bird habitat on a mix of state, town, and private land in the Hinesburg area. With an eye on golden-winged warblers, American woodcock and other species that depend on shrub habitat, the project will enhance 50 acres by removing invasive species and encroaching trees and planting native shrubs that provide food and cover. The project is expected to be completed in 2020.

◆ Working with Private Landowners

In 2019, Andrea visited with more than 30 privately-owned properties, totaling about 3,000 acres. These free visits provided one-on-one guidance to Vermont landowners to improve their property for songbirds, bats, pollinators, salamanders, bear, deer, moose, and other critters. A number of landowner resources are also on the department website including a landowner guidebook, a 40-minute video on creating backyard wildlife habitat and brochures.

◆ Delivering Interactive Trainings and Workshops

Department biologists provided dozens of workshops to more than 800 Vermonters, including private landowners, consulting foresters, town forest and conservation committees and other conservation partners. Topics ranged from creating forest structure for wildlife to improving pollinator habitat.

...And Bees

Vermont's insects benefit from habitat restoration and enhancement intended for larger species, but this year one Habitat Stamp project was aimed directly at them.

A 1.8-acre field was planted on Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department's Dead Creek Wildlife Management Area in West Addison for bees and butterflies, both vital to plant reproduction and our

food supply. The Dead Creek Area is home to at least one hundred species of bees. Recent studies have underscored the importance creating these types of habitat—*islands of long-lasting meadows of native wildflowers in agricultural areas.* Wild turkeys and whitetail deer will also benefit from the additional rearing cover that the native plants would provide.



Tri-colored Bumble Bee

Paul Hamelin



photo courtesy of NWTF



Department habitat biologist Andrea Shortsleeve leading a workshop on Hinesburg Town Forest.

VFWD

The rehabilitated field, once used as pasture and then for hay and bedding, was adopted by Middlebury's Hannaford Career School several years ago. The students removed fence, installed blue bird boxes, mowed, and researched the potential for a pollinator planting. The turkey connection helped make their work a reality. The National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF) partnered with the department to prepare and plant field.

Department staff first conducted a controlled burn to cut back the existing vegetation and return nutrients to the soil. A NWTF contractor applied lime to balance the soil acidity and then broadcasted 18 pounds of seed. The seed mix was custom made under guidance of department botanist Bob Popp. It included swamp milkweed, black-eyed Susan, blue vervain, boneset, wild bergamot and more.

Results of the plantings are expected in the next year or two.



photo courtesy White River Partnership

on a VFWD Streambank parcel on the White River in Bethel;

- ◆ Friends of the Winooski, Central Vermont Trout Unlimited, and a local Cub Scout troop (40+ volunteers) planted trees on a Streambank parcel on Mill Brook in Jericho;
- ◆ Forest Parks and Recreation, the Lamoille County Conservation District, Friends of the Winooski River, Redstart Forestry, and Sun Common (60 volunteers) planted trees next to an FPR agricultural license on the Little River in Stowe

Will and his staff discussed the benefits that trees provide by keeping streams cool, complex and clean, which trout and other coldwater species need to survive. Landowners are encouraged to protect and restore wooded areas along their streams and rivers.

Cold Water Connections

Habitat restoration along streams and rivers continued in 2019, thanks to the work of stream habitat biologist Will Eldridge.

◆ Eliminating obstacles to aquatic organism passage

Reconnecting streams and rivers by removing obsolete dams and upgrading culverts is critical to increasing the productivity and resilience of wild fish populations and other aquatic organisms. Eldridge worked with State, Federal and watershed partners to develop aquatic connectivity teams in the White, Winooski, Mad River, Lamoille, Batten Kill, Mettawee, and Missisquoi River Watersheds to tackle problem dams and culverts that block aquatic organism movement in some of the best trout streams in the state.

◆ Improving Fish Habitat on 'Streambank Parcels'

Eldridge also continued to improve fish habitat on the department's many 'Streambank Parcels,' narrow strips of land along rivers and streams originally purchased to provide fishing access. Many of these parcels are unmarked and unknown to the public. Eldridge is working to help the public find these areas, address encroachments by adjacent properties and restore forested streambanks.

◆ Planting Trees and Vegetation Along Shorelines

In the spring of 2019, Eldridge worked with watershed partners to demonstrate aquatic conservation practices to schools, youth groups and volunteers throughout the state:

- ◆ White River Partnership and 13 area schools (600+ students) planted trees

Room to Roam

The Habitat Stamp is essential for the stewardship of the department's 99 Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs). Each dollar donated leverages an additional three dollars from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service for WMA habitat management. During the past year, Habitat Stamp funding was used to maintain and improve **470 acres** of habitat on **16 WMAs** statewide:

- ◆ **230 acres** of old field/meadow and shrubland habitat was maintained by mowing to provide fruits, berries, insects, forage, cover and nesting sites.
- ◆ **156 acres** of invasive plants were controlled in wildlife openings by repeated mowing treatments.



- ◆ **50 acres** of grassland habitat was fertilized and mowed to improve the quality of grassland bird habitat.
- ◆ **17 acres** of wild apple orchards were maintained by brush mowing.
- ◆ **15 acres** of old field was enhanced by selective mowing and planting 200 shrubs and saplings.
- ◆ **1.8 acres** of pollinator habitat and nesting cover was planted in partnership with the National Wild Turkey Federation.
- ◆ **1.5 acres** of invasive shrubs removed, 125 silver maple trees were planted on 0.5 river miles.

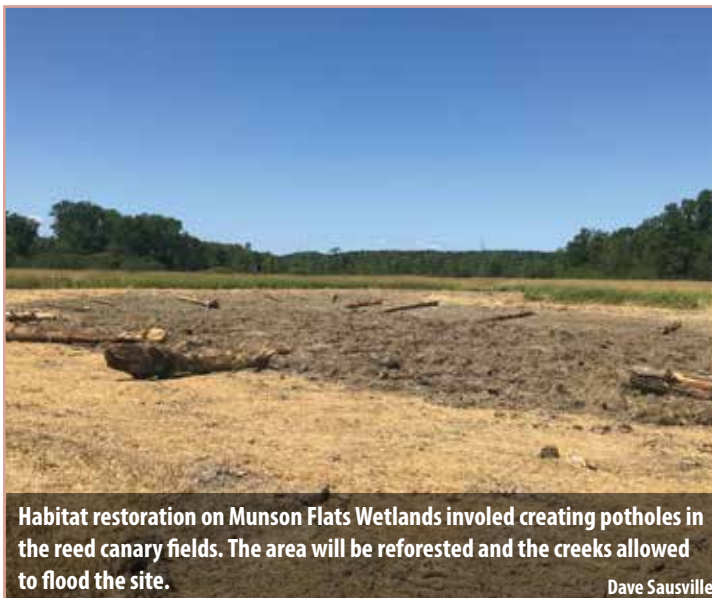
While no stamp-funded land acquisition occurred in 2019, three projects are nearing completion and will be finalized in early 2020:

- ◆ **141.3-acre acquisition at Malletts Creek Wildlife Management Area in Colchester.**

The department currently owns just under 2,000 acres of the Lake Champlain marshland known as Munson Flats Wetlands and is now pursuing the acquisition of additional 141.3 acres of this system. The parcel is currently owned by ECHO, Leahy Center for Lake Champlain. Given its proximity to Burlington and surrounding suburban communities, conserving this important property ensures it won't be developed and will be available for the public to enjoy for years to come.

- ◆ **A new WMA in Shrewsbury.**

The department is working with the town of Shrewsbury and a large landowner to acquire 527-acres of forest habitat. This property is part of a large forest block that provides habitat connectivity for south central Vermont and is an important part of the larger connected landscape of the northeast. Connectivity blocks are critical for animals with large home ranges (bear, bobcat, etc.) and they provide plants and animals



Habitat restoration on Munson Flats Wetlands involved creating potholes in the reed canary fields. The area will be reforested and the creeks allowed to flood the site. Dave Sausville



Kesick Swamp WMA

Lawrence Pyne

with pathways to shift their ranges due to changing environmental conditions and allow genetic exchange between populations. Conserving it as a new WMA will also permanently protect public access for wildlife-based activities such as hunting, bird watching and hiking.

- ◆ **Two additional properties at Kesick Swamp WMA in Sunderland.**

These properties will be conserved through conservation easements in partnership with the Vermont Land Trust and provide an easy, convenient access point to the rather inaccessible WMA. While the properties will remain in private ownership, public access will be guaranteed through conservation easements.

The View Ahead

The first four years of the Vermont Habitat Stamp program has been a success and 2019 was no exception. So far, the stamp has contributed to the conservation of 3,200 acres of land, the restoration of streams and rivers, and the removal of dysfunctional dams for fish passage. 2020 promises to build on this success, with a twist; a special commemorative stamp that celebrates the 100th anniversary of the department's Wildlife Management Areas.

Get yours at www.vtfishandwildlife.com/vthabitatstamp.

Thank you!



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