

2020 Vermont Habitat Stamp Annual Report



Pomainville WMA – Aiden Good

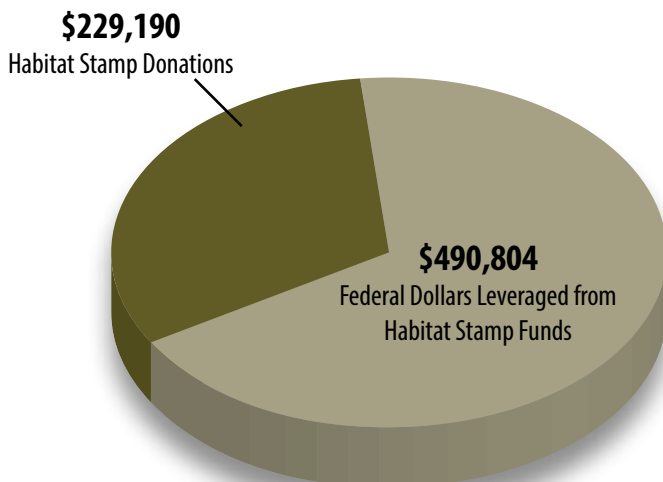
Last year marked a significant milestone for fish and wildlife conservation in Vermont, and for the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department (VFWD), as we celebrated 100 years of Wildlife Management Area (WMA) conservation. The special edition 2020 Vermont Habitat Stamp colorfully commemorates the formation of the Sandbar Waterfowl Refuge in 1920, the state's first WMA. Thanks to the generous donations from Habitat Stamp supporters — the highest number of donors and donations since the program began in 2015 — VFWD received \$241,968 and the bulk of these donations leveraged \$490,803 in federal funds. We put your donations to work in habitat improvement, streambank restoration, private landowner assistance, and land acquisition, including the new Town Farm WMA in Shrewsbury that was dedicated as Vermont's 100th WMA. The VFWD thanks everyone who contributed through the purchase of a Habitat Stamp to manage, enhance and expand these 100 special places.

By The Numbers*

- **12,700** donations totaled **\$241,968** and earned **\$6,487** in interest
- **\$229,190** in Habitat Stamp funds were spent and were matched by an additional **\$490,804** in federal funds

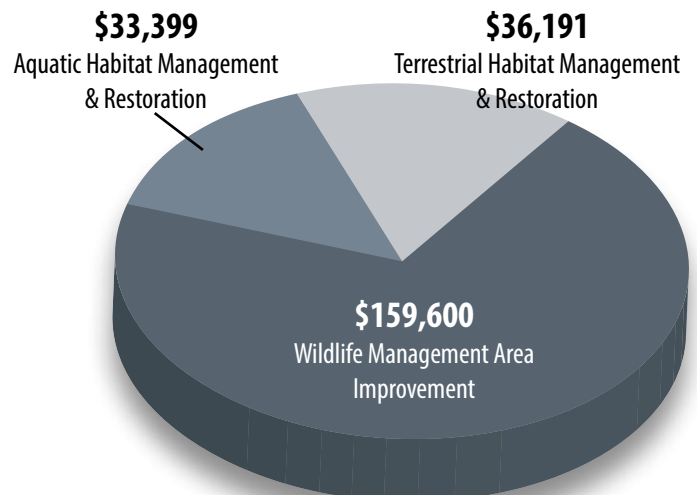
Total Conservation Funding: \$719,994

Where the Money Came From



Total Habitat Stamp Funds Spent: \$229,190**

How the Money Was Spent



* Dates are 12/01/19 through 11/30/20

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

Birds and Beyond

VFWD continued working with private landowners and conservation partners to improve habitat for birds and other wildlife through a combination of private landowner site visits, habitat restoration projects and virtual workshops.

◆ Partnering in Conservation

VFWD completed a variety of projects with conservation partners to improve streambank and shrubland habitat on **70** acres in the towns of Charlotte and Hinesburg. With an eye on golden-winged warbler, American woodcock, deer, and other species that depend on streambank parcels and shrublands, these projects removed invasive plants and planted native shrubs that provide food and cover for birds and other wildlife.



Stout property in Shrewsbury –Tim Stout



Twelve acres of invasive plant removal was completed at Geprag's Community Park in Hinesburg to regenerate shrubland habitat at a popular bird watching location.

"I've maintained my land for 40 years, but I wanted to explore other ways to manage the forests and streams for wildlife, so I contacted Andrea Shortsleeve with the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department to come take a look. My primary land management objectives are to control invasive species, sequester carbon, and provide diverse and resilient forest habitat for wildlife. I am looking forward to working with Fish & Wildlife to improve these 400 acres into the future."

—Tim Stout, Shrewsbury resident

◆ Working with Private Landowners

VFWD assisted landowners on **45** properties covering over **7,165** acres to improve wildlife habitat. This technical support provided one-on-one guidance to Vermont landowners to improve their property for songbirds, bats, black bear, deer, moose, and other wildlife, with ancillary benefits to pollinators, amphibians and more. Because most land in Vermont is privately owned, these landowners are critical to successful wildlife conservation in Vermont. In addition to a visit from a VFWD habitat biologist, several landowner resources are also available on the department website, including a landowner guidebook, a 40-minute video on creating backyard wildlife habitat and several brochures.

◆ Delivering Interactive Trainings and Workshops

Due to restrictions on public gatherings during the COVID-19 pandemic, VFWD, along with other department staff and conservation partners, participated in **11** online workshop training events and **13** virtual presentations. Topics included invasive plant treatment, pollinator habitats, improving hunter access, town forest management for wildlife, and an introduction to Women Owning Woodlands.



Tim Stout, private landowner, and Andrea Shortsleeve, VFWD biologist, discuss strategies to improve pollinator habitat, such as delayed mowing and wildflower production.

Chris Ingram

Cold Water Connections

VFWD continued efforts to restore habitat for fish and other wildlife along streams and rivers throughout Vermont in 2020.

◆ Eliminating Obstacles and Improving Aquatic Organism Passage

Reconnecting streams and rivers by removing derelict dams and upgrading culverts is critical to increasing the resilience of wild fish populations and other aquatic organisms. VFWD continues to work with local municipalities, state and federal governments, and non-profit partners in watersheds across Vermont to improve aquatic habitat connectivity. VFWD coordinated regulatory review of **25** road stream crossings to ensure that aquatic organism passage requirements are met when bridges and culverts are repaired or replaced.

VFWD consulted with the Vermont Natural Resources Council to design the removal of the department-owned Pelletier Dam in Castleton, which once removed, will open **30** miles of stream to brook and brown trout along a tributary of the Castleton River.

Several new innovations were implemented in 2020, including the retrofitting of existing dams and the installation of experimental “flexi-baffles.”

◆ Improving Streambank Parcels and Restoring Floodplains

VFWD worked to protect and restore trees along streams and rivers, where they shade and feed fish, filter pollutants, and stabilize banks. VFWD and partners met with **7** landowners to discuss conservation easements and tree plantings to permanently protect aquatic habitat. VFWD advised UVM researchers and others on experimental designs to test forest restoration in the presence of invasive species and worked with a contractor to reduce invasive knotweed on state lands along the Little River and White River. VFWD also worked with an angling organization to develop outreach campaigns for private landowners around protecting and restoring trees along their streams and rivers.

VFWD continued floodplain restoration on a **35-acre** department-owned streambank parcel along the White River in Bethel, including removing portions of a man-made berm and filling a drainage ditch to restore the site to its natural hydrologic conditions and to allow for floodwaters to enter the floodplain once again. Flood waters carry nutrients and seed propagules that help replenish the regenerating floodplain forest. Additional tree planting and invasive species removal were also completed at the site in 2020.



Greg Russ - White River Partnership

Flexi-baffles can be installed into existing culverts to assist with fish passage by altering the flow of water to provide fish a place to rest as they migrate upstream.

◆ Stewardship and Outreach

VFWD has become an advisor to the “**Stream Wise**” initiative, a collaborative effort to improve riparian areas on private lands. The Lake Champlain Basin Program is developing the Stream Wise program with representatives from Vermont, New York, and Quebec to coordinate outreach among municipal, state, federal and international resource managers and government agencies, watershed organizations and special interest groups, and to empower individuals and build community around watershed stewardship.

VFWD is an advisor to the Functioning Floodplains Initiative, a collaborative partnership among state, academic, and industry partners that is using field and remote sensing data to improve our understanding of stream and river form and function, flood events, water quality concerns, and other aquatic habitat threats. This information will be used to design practical and effective solutions to mitigate impacts to rivers and streams.

VFWD continues to steward Streambank Management Areas and is working to increase public awareness of these parcels.

Portions of a large berm were removed while retaining large trees to allow flood waters from the White River to reach the floodplain once again.



VFWD collaborates with the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation and Vermont Department of Forest, Parks, and Recreation to develop Long Range Management plans to ensure aquatic communities and public access are considered in land acquisition, community planning and habitat restoration.



Chris Ingram

VFWD Wildlife Specialist Joel Flewelling points out tracks to event participants at the Town Farm WMA September celebration.

Room to Roam

The Habitat Stamp is essential for the stewardship of Wildlife Management Areas. Every dollar donated leverages an additional three dollars from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service for WMA habitat management. During the past year, Habitat Stamp funds were used at WMAs throughout the state, including mowing grasslands to benefit bird habitat, maintaining wildlife openings, controlling invasive plants that impact native shrub habitat, releasing fruit and nut producing trees used as important food sources by many wildlife, and restoring riparian habitat by planting native trees and shrubs.

Town Farm WMA - Shrewsbury *Vermont's 100th WMA in 100 Years*

After learning of its wildlife value through VFWD's Community Wildlife Program, the Shrewsbury Conservation Commission attempted to arrange funding to conserve a 527-acre parcel, known as the Hidalgo property. After several years of dead ends and with a sizeable lead gift pledged by the Vermont Land Trust — bequeathed by the late Joan Sibley, Shrewsbury resident and wildlife enthusiast — the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department stepped in as the new prospective owner in 2019. The department then leveraged its Habitat Stamp program which provided local supporters a dedicated channel to raise the remaining funds to finally acquire the property.

On August 4, 2020, the Town Farm WMA was dedicated as Vermont's 100th WMA, coincidentally, in 100 year anniversary of WMA ownership and management. The new WMA is part of a large forest block that provides habitat connectivity for south central Vermont and is an important piece of the larger connected landscape of the Northeast. Connectivity blocks are critical for wide-ranging mammals such as deer, bear, bobcat and moose. On a smaller scale, this property contains small

wetlands, vernal pools, early successional forests, and mast-producing trees. In addition to protecting valuable habitat for wildlife and forest connectivity, this property safeguards public use for hunting, wildlife viewing and other dispersed wildlife-based recreation.

On September 26, 2020, members of VFWD, Vermont Land Trust, and dozens of Shrewsbury residents gathered at Town Farm WMA to commemorate this milestone achievement and to acknowledge the unique partnerships that allowed this project to come to completion.

Plans for 2021 – Roaring Brook WMA

Located in the towns of Guilford and Vernon, the Roaring Brook WMA totals 1,401 acres, broken into 11 separate parcels ranging in size from 10 to 995 acres. Due to its southern location, many of the plant species found on the parcels are rare and uncommon in Vermont and are more like those found in Massachusetts. These species include flowering dogwood, black gum, mountain laurel, scarlet oak, and American chestnut.

Public access to the Roaring Brook WMA is limited due to its proximity to Interstate 91, disconnected parcels, and lack of rights-of-way through private lands. The department has entered into purchase agreements on three privately-owned parcels to be added to the WMA in 2020 and 2021. This project will add 445 acres and conserve habitat for two federally listed species, more than a dozen state listed species, improve forest connectivity, and expand public access across the WMA.

The View Ahead

This past year has demonstrated the important connection Vermonters have with nature and the value of our Wildlife Management Areas. In our first one hundred years of WMA ownership, we have protected and conserved more than 130,000 acres for wildlife and wildlife-based recreation across 100 areas statewide. As we enter the next century of wildlife management area conservation in Vermont, we will continue to uphold our mission to provide habitat, abundant wildlife and public access for all Vermonters.

Thank you for your donations in 2020. Your support conserves land, protects clean water and restores healthy wildlife habitat. Please help to continue Vermont's conservation legacy by donating to the 2021 Habitat Stamp: vthabitatstamp.com.

Thank you!



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