

**VERMONT FISH & WILDLIFE
DEPARTMENT**

**FISHING ACCESS AREA PROGRAM
2021 MAINTENANCE AND CONSTRUCTION REPORT**

Submitted to:
Vermont Legislative Committee
House Natural Resources, Fish, and Wildlife

Submitted by:
Christopher Herrick, Commissioner
Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department
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2021 VERMONT FISH AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT FISHING ACCESS AREA
MAINTENANCE AND CONSTRUCTION REPORT

BACKGROUND

The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department (Department) acquires, maintains and manages fishing access areas around the state. These areas provide public access to public waters for Vermonters and visitors alike. Fishing access areas are very popular, heavily used, and help connect people to the outdoors. If the Department did not have this program, most members of the public would have to pay for access and would have far fewer opportunities to recreate on public waters to fish, boat, hunt, or trap in Vermont.

The Department maintains these recreational facilities in order to provide easy and safe access to the public waters of Vermont. In calendar year 2021, the Fishing Access Area Program maintained 196 developed fishing access areas on 130 unique waterbodies. Targeted user groups are anglers, recreational boaters, waterfowl hunters, and trappers. In 2021, there were 135,987 licensed anglers, waterfowl hunters, and trappers and approximately 28,000 registered Vermont motorboats that potentially used Department Fishing Access Areas, along with the tens of thousands of unregistered non-motorized paddlecraft and motorboats registered in other states.

FUNDING

The Fishing Access Area Program is funded primarily by Vermont motorboat registration fees and Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration funds (SFR). The Department received \$422,000 in FY21 from motorboat registration fees per 23 V.S.A. § 3319, which directs 34% of the fees to the Fishing Access Area Program. This was a \$7,900 decrease over FY20. These state funds are used to match SFR funds which are generated from a federal excise tax on fishing tackle, boats, motors, and marine fuels. In FY21, the SFR apportionment for Vermont fishing access areas was \$621,000, which was an increase of \$67,000 over last year.

Over the last decade state and federal funding for the Fishing Access Area Program was extremely volatile, including some significant decreases in funding early in the decade. During the 4-year period from FY12 to FY15 there was a continual decline in funding, which totaled \$81,500 or 9%. The largest state funding drop was from FY14 to FY15 (\$100,000 or 29%). Federal funding dropped by \$51,000 or 10.5% between FY13 and FY14.

In the last 6 years, there was a strong rebound in dedicated funding. In FY16 there was a \$102,000 (10.6%) bump and the annual allocation gradually rose year over year from FY17 to FY21. The 10-year average funding is \$945,000 and FY21 jumped nearly 11% to \$1,043,500. Additional funding over this same time has come in the form of capital funding, averaging \$125,500 annually. Capital funding used in combination with federal aid and motorboat registration funds continues to help the program make considerable gains in addressing the backlog of needed ramp repairs and dock installations, which have improved accessibility for all fishing access area users.

In the past 2 years, the Access Area Program was also the recipient of funding associated with COVID-19. In 2020, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act helped the Department adjust to the dramatic rise in outdoor recreation. The program was able

2021 VERMONT FISH AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT FISHING ACCESS AREA
MAINTENANCE AND CONSTRUCTION REPORT

to put over \$850,000 to use by expanding parking areas, improving boat ramps, building paddling access sites, and providing additional toilet facilities. In 2021, a general fund allocation continued to assist the Agency of Natural Resources with a \$5,000,000 appropriation. Again, the program benefited with a \$1,450,000 increase in funding for expansion and enhancement of public boating and fishing facilities.

MAINTENANCE & INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS

In calendar year 2021, the Fishing Access Area Program spent \$1,075,433.16. These expenses were for basic maintenance, staff time, and infrastructure projects, including General Fund funded projects (Table 1). Annual operating expenditures totaled \$838,561 and ranged from \$1,281 for trash disposal fees to over \$278,890 for program administration, including staff time and engineering design. As usual, the bulk of the program's expenditures went to pay for facility operations and maintenance (\$552,586), which included lawn mowing, trash pick-up, parking lot and driveway grading, dock maintenance, snow removal, and portable toilet services. This is an average annual cost of \$2,819 per fishing access area.

Over the past 5 years, the access program completed 47 infrastructure projects using traditional access program funds as well General funds totaling \$1,113,275 (Table 2). Note: this does not include the one-time CARES Act funding, where 23 projects were completed in 2020 for an additional \$660,000. These projects ranged from installing new stormwater infrastructure to major boat ramp construction. In 2021, 7 different projects were completed, including 4 ramp improvements (Colchester Point – Colchester; Marshfield Reservoir – Cabot; Great Averill Pond – Averill; North Thetford – Thetford), one dock refurbishment (Malletts Bay – Colchester), and one paddling access improvement (Winooski River Streambank – Berlin) (Figures 1 & 2). General funding paid for the 4 of the projects for a total of \$183,206 and Capital funding paid for a portion of one project totaling \$26,254.

The seventh infrastructure project that was undertaken by the Department was unique and has not yet resulted in any improvements. Part of any project design and permitting, includes ensuring historic resources are not negatively impacted. The Fort Cassin ramp is located at the mouth of the Otter Creek in Ferrisburg and it was discovered that a historic site dating back 5,500 years is under the existing concrete boat ramp (Figure 3). The Department is currently in the process of working with the Stockbridge-Munsee Band of the Mohican Indians and the Vermont State Historic Preservation Office to modify the project to limit any potential impacts to the site. To date, historic resource assessment costs were significant, totaling \$46,413.

COVID-19

Across the nation, the popularity of outdoor recreational activities rose dramatically throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The Outdoor Industry Association (OIA) reported in 2019 that less than half of the US population participated in any form of outdoor recreation. In May 2020, that figure spiked to 81%. This increase can be attributed to restaurants, theaters, and other out-of-home activities shutting down or limiting their capacity. These changes were highlighted in Vermont by the record increase in hunting and fishing license sales in 2020, which remained high in 2021. OIA's report also noted boating in the US is at an all-time high

2021 VERMONT FISH AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT FISHING ACCESS AREA
MAINTENANCE AND CONSTRUCTION REPORT

and that fishing was among the highest increases in participation in 2020. While reports for 2021 are not yet out, anecdotal reports indicate these participation rates have remained high.

These dramatic increases are a clear result of COVID-19 and the public's desire to find healthy activities while remaining socially distanced. Over the past two fiscal years, the governor and legislature have responded by allocating additional funding to the Department to ensure the public can safely access these recreational resources

One of the significant negatives that the program has experienced over the past 2 years has been the loss of the Department of Corrections Community Work Crew Program (DOC). This program provided weekly maintenance services (trash pick-up, grass mowing, sign maintenance, etc.) to over 97% of the access areas. DOC crews were suspended in the spring of 2020 and provided limited services beginning in July 2021. While it is understandable why the DOC crews were suspended, it highlighted the critical role that they play in the weekly operation and maintenance of the Access Area Program.

Without any reliable weekly maintenance services, the Department had to get creative in how to keep the access areas safe and free of trash. In 2020, the access program enlisted Department staff to help pick up trash at roughly half of the fishing access areas. The remaining sites went without any regular maintenance. In 2021, a bid solicitation was issued for trash pick-up, which is only a portion of the DOC crew responsibilities. Of the 196 access areas, 111 were selected to be serviced by private contractors. The bid results for the remaining 85 sites were either extraordinarily high (47) so no contract was issued or no bids were received (38) for those sites. Of those 85 sites without a trash maintenance contract, Department staff regularly maintained 14 sites and a volunteer needing to fulfill community service requirements maintained another 12 sites. This brought the total number of access areas being maintained for trash pick-up to 137.

The loss of the DOC crews resulted in increased maintenance costs and a loss in available maintenance services. From 2015-2019, the average DOC cost for trash removal, lawn mowing, landscaping, and sign maintenance was \$63,795 or \$334 per access area for 191 sites. In 2021, just to pick up trash it cost an average of \$777 per site for 111 sites. If that were extrapolated to include all 196 access areas, the cost would have been over \$152,000. This would not only be a substantial financial increase, but the decrease in services would also be significant as well. This change in maintenance was not lost on the public who frequently reached out to the Department to inquire why sites were not being maintained to previous years' standards. Finally, it should not be overlooked that the most expensive bids were thrown out rather than pay upwards of \$2,500 per site.

FUTURE PROJECTS

The upcoming 2022 construction season is gearing up to be extremely busy. The remaining balance of the General Funds has been earmarked for 15 distinct access projects, including land acquisition, ramp repairs, and development of numerous paddling access site. Completion of all projects will depend on final bid prices. There are an additional 4 projects that could also be completed with dedicated access area funds and capital appropriations.

2021 VERMONT FISH AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT FISHING ACCESS AREA
MAINTENANCE AND CONSTRUCTION REPORT

CONTACTS

Any questions or comments regarding the Fishing Access Area Program should be directed to:

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2021 VERMONT FISH AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT FISHING ACCESS AREA
MAINTENANCE AND CONSTRUCTION REPORT

Table 1. Summary of all expenditures for Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department's Fishing Access Area Program, 2021. *See Table 2 for a more detailed breakdown of infrastructure improvements.*

PROJECT DESCRIPTION	AMOUNT
Infrastructure Improvement Projects	
<i>Access Area Program Funded</i>	\$ 21,914.02
<i>Capital Funded</i>	\$ 31,752.34
<i>General Funded</i>	\$ 183,205.89
Site Work Maintenance (i.e. gravel, grading, excavation)	\$ 152,246.58
Dock Maintenance	\$ 53,329.75
Weekly Grounds Maintenance	
<i>Department of Corrections Community Restitution Crews</i>	\$ 23,489.19
<i>Lawn and Maintenance Services (Not DOC)</i>	\$ 86,322.25
Portable Toilet Rentals	\$ 103,942.88
Snow Removal	\$ 48,325.00
Purchase of building materials, supplies, equipment rentals, etc.	\$ 6,047.99
Payments for Public Access on Private Lands (i.e. leases)	\$ 5,100.00
PILOT (payments in lieu of taxes)	\$ 53,780.40
Engineering & staff time – admin, design, & construction	\$ 278,956.29
Historic Preservation/Archaeology Consultation	\$ 6,088.70
Signage	\$ 2,624.30
Clean Water fees	\$ 5,325.09
Utilities	\$ 5,440.16
Permitting	\$ 3,383.20
Trash Disposal	\$ 1,280.86
Miscellaneous Administrative Expenses (gas, IT, etc.)	\$ 1,948.26
TOTAL FISHING ACCESS AREA EXPENDITURES	\$ 1,075,433.15

2021 VERMONT FISH AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT FISHING ACCESS AREA
MAINTENANCE AND CONSTRUCTION REPORT

Table 2. List of fishing access areas infrastructure projects from 2017 through 2021. Projects were funded with either state motorboat registration, capital funds, or general funds and often cost-shared with Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration funding. ADA = Americans with Disabilities Act.

	SITE	PROJECT DESCRIPTION	COST
2017	Dillenbeck Bay	Constructed new concrete boat ramp where gravel ramp previously existed	\$ 51,500.00
	Shelburne Pond	Constructed new concrete boat ramp where gravel ramp previously existed	\$ 45,959.19
	Benson Landing	New ADA dock (60 ft)	\$ 47,184.85
	Crystal Lake*	Relocated ADA dock from Larabee's Pt (50 ft)	\$ 16,563.14
	Island Pond	Relocated dock from Magoon Access (Lake Dunmore) (50 ft)	\$ 2,082.50
	Lake St. Catherine	New ADA dock (50 ft)	\$ 27,559.18
	Larabee's Point	New ADA dock (70 ft)	\$ 50,354.60
	Magoon	New ADA dock (50 ft)	\$ 28,013.43
	Seymour Lake	New ADA dock (50 ft)	\$ 30,079.93
	South Bay	New ADA with fishing platform (50 ft)	\$ 35,123.09
	Whipple Point	New ADA dock (60 ft)	\$ 30,160.89
		2017 TOTAL	\$ 364,580.80
	2018	Chittenden Reservoir*	New ADA dock (50 ft)
Kehoe*		New ADA dock (50 ft)	\$ 16,575.51
Lake Fairlee		New ADA dock (50 ft)	\$ 28,502.26
Lake Morey*		New ADA dock (50 ft)	\$ 26,025.01
Lake Rescue*		New ADA dock (50 ft)	\$ 15,791.90
Larry Greene*		New 20 ft dock extension	\$ 8,319.39
Norton Pond		New ADA dock (50 ft)	\$ 26,982.53
Crystal Lake**		New concrete dock abutment to make fully ADA	\$ 11,549.30
Evanoika		ADA parking & path to dock	\$ 10,923.95
Kehoe		ADA parking & path to dock	\$ 7,954.25
Lake St. Catherine		ADA parking & path to dock	\$ 16,460.55
Magoon		ADA parking & path to dock	\$ 8,020.00
Larabee's Point		ADA parking & path to dock	\$ 7,216.00
Chimney Point		ADA parking & path to dock	\$ 9,610.00
Marshfield Reservoir		ADA parking & path to dock	\$ 11,500.00
Whipple Point		ADA parking & path to dock	\$ 6,049.50
South Bay		ADA parking & path to dock	\$ 5,148.74
Seymour Lake		ADA parking & path to dock	\$ 2,246.75
Big Salem Lake		ADA parking & path to dock	\$ 4,551.75
Berlin Pond		New parking & carry-on access	\$ 25,590.00

2021 VERMONT FISH AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT FISHING ACCESS AREA
MAINTENANCE AND CONSTRUCTION REPORT

	Wenlock WMA	Constructed new paddling access	\$ 1,860.33
	Clyde River	Constructed stairs to aid in paddler access	\$ 1,860.33
	Rotary Access	Constructed stairs to aid in paddler access	\$ 1,726.32
	2018 TOTAL		\$ 273,532.90
2019	Chittenden Res.**	New ADA dock (60 ft)	\$ 12,514.96
	Kehoe**	New ADA dock (north ramp) (50 ft)	\$ 13,818.06
	Larry Greene**	New 20 ft dock extension	\$ 8,932.61
	Lake Rescue*	New ADA dock (50 ft)	\$ 7,778.11
	Seymour Lake	Water quality project	\$ 2,029.52
	2019 TOTAL		\$ 45,073.26
2020	Curtis Pond	New ADA low profile dock (40 x 8 ft)	\$ 27,122.54
	Bristol Pond	New ADA low profile dock (36 x 8 ft)	\$ 23,624.29
	Harvey's Lake	New ADA dock (44 ft)	\$ 26,331.17
	Shelburne Pond**	New ADA dock (48 ft) – dock was originally purchased for Lake Rescue	\$ 4,748.25
	Dummerston	New ramp on Connecticut River & ADA parking	\$ 111,390.00
	2020 TOTAL		\$ 193,216.25
2021	Winooski River	Constructed stairs to aid in paddler access	\$ 920.04
	Streambank		
	Marshfield Reservoir	Ramp dredging (construction oversight only; GMP funded)	\$ 5,498.72
	Malletts Bay	Dock refurbishment	\$ 47,247.60
	Great Averill	Ramp reconstruction	\$ 36,761.03
	North Thetford	Ramp reconstruction	\$ 46,207.11
	Colchester Pt	Ramp dredging	\$ 53,824.75
	Fort Cassin	Permitting & archaeology work	\$ 46,413.00
	2021 TOTAL		\$ 236,872.25
	5 YEAR TOTAL		\$ 1,113,275.46

*Denotes only partial payment for a dock had not yet been installed.

**Denotes final payment and installation charges for a dock.

2021 VERMONT FISH AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT FISHING ACCESS AREA
MAINTENANCE AND CONSTRUCTION REPORT



Figure 1. Malletts Bay (Colchester) – New anchoring systems were installed on the two docks in 2020 using CARES Act funding and in 2021 both docks were refurbished by replacing floats, bumpers, and broken planks. This site is the Department’s largest and busiest fishing access area. These modifications will increase the docks’ longevity and boaters’ safety

2021 VERMONT FISH AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT FISHING ACCESS AREA
MAINTENANCE AND CONSTRUCTION REPORT



Figure 2. Before and after photos of the Colchester Point Fishing Access Area ramp on the Winooski River in Colchester Point. Severe siltation issues prevented boats from launching during most months of the year. The ramp was dredged this past fall to improve accessibility to the Winooski River and Lake Champlain.

2021 VERMONT FISH AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT FISHING ACCESS AREA
MAINTENANCE AND CONSTRUCTION REPORT



Figure 3. Fort Cassin Access Area on the Otter Creek in Ferrisburg was excavated by archaeologists prior to initiating planned ramp improvements. Numerous spearpoints, pottery, and other artifacts were recovered from the site that dates back 5,500 years. Modifications to the project are currently being explored to minimize disturbance to the site.