

# DEAD CREEK

## Wildlife Management Area



## Welcome

Dead Creek is a slow, northerly-flowing stream draining a 50 square mile basin in the towns of Bridport, Addison, Pantton, and Ferrisburgh, Vermont. It empties into Otter Creek near its mouth at Lake Champlain.

The Dead Creek Wildlife Management Area (WMA) was established in 1950 to provide breeding and migratory habitat for waterfowl. It is owned by the State of Vermont and managed by the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department. Acquisition and development efforts included construction of dams with water level control structures and the protection of nearly 3,000 acres. The area consists of wetlands, grasslands, woodlots, and agricultural fields.

Dam construction has greatly increased open water and permanently-flooded wetland areas. Habitats are enhanced through a combination of periodic mowing, burning, managing water levels, and agricultural activities. These activities benefit more than 250 species of birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians. Funding for the WMA has been generated primarily from a federal tax on sporting arms and ammunition, and the purchase of hunting licenses and habitat stamps.



Part of the Dead Creek WMA is designated as a *refuge*, and visitors are asked to keep out of this area at all times. However, you are welcome to observe wildlife in the refuge from the viewing area pavilion on Route 17.

# Habitats of Dead Creek WMA

Dead Creek WMA is a mosaic of habitats and natural communities. Its diverse landscape offers feeding, nesting, and resting areas to a large variety birds, mammals, fish, reptiles, and amphibians. A red fox may rest in the forest by day, travel through sheltering shrubbery at dusk to hunt in nearby fields, and then walk to open water to drink. Geese might feed in agricultural fields by day, and then fly to water for safety from predators at night. Each day, many animals walk, fly, swim, and crawl among these different habitats. They eat, are eaten, avoid, and interact with each other.



### Clayplain Forest

The oak-hickory woodlands around Dead Creek are remnants of a once vast forest that covered the Champlain Valley.

The trees and plants have adapted to thrive on fine, moist-to-wet clay soils. Because there is so much open land in the valley today, these forests provide critical habitat to upland wildlife such as turkeys, gray squirrels, woodpeckers, raptors, and a variety of songbirds. They are also home to many rare plant species.



### Upland Grasslands

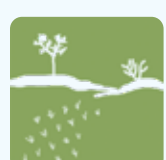
Some fields on the WMA are mowed or burned every few years to provide habitat for grassland-nesting songbirds and waterfowl. Grasslands are also home to meadow voles and cottontail rabbits which are important food sources for predators.



### Shrub Edge

Along field edges and waterways you may find dense vegetation consisting mainly of gray dogwood and prickly ash.

This growth is home to rabbits, grouse, woodcock, catbirds, and yellow warblers. It is also used as a travel corridor by deer, foxes, and coyotes. The dogwood provides fruit for birds in the fall.



### Agricultural Fields

The agricultural fields on the WMA provide important feeding areas for wildlife. Legumes (clover, trefoil, and alfalfa) and grasses are used by deer, rabbits, and woodchucks, as well as thousands of Canada

and snow geese during migration. Corn provides a source of high-energy food for geese, deer, turkeys, and many small mammals. Where there is prey, there are predators such as coyotes and northern harrisers, taking advantage of the open fields.



### Cattail Marsh

Cattails and rushes grow in most of Dead Creek's wetlands. Cattails form dense stands that provide homes for muskrats, rails, bitterns, and marsh wrens. When muskrats use cattails for food and shelter, they create openings and channels for waterfowl and wading birds. Sometimes cattails can crowd out other important plant life. Periodic mowing or burning creates or maintains valuable openings in the cattails.



### Wet Meadows

Some meadows have saturated soils and may grow sedges instead of grasses. A few animals thrive in this environment, such as certain moles and shrews. In late summer, monarch butterflies feed and lay their eggs on milkweed, including the swamp milkweed growing in wet meadows.



### Aquatic Plants

Plants adapted to grow in water provide food and shelter for many amphibians, fish, and invertebrates. Great blue herons and egrets, as well as other wading birds, hunt among the plants for these animals. Dabbling ducks, such as mallards and blue-winged teal, eat the seeds and the invertebrates living among them.

## Habitat Management Activities

### Water Control Structures

You may see concrete structures at some of the dams along Dead Creek. The structures increase our ability to manage wetlands for different wildlife. Annual schedules are created for water level changes at each impoundment. In some years, the changes are very subtle and reduced by only 25%. In other years, the water is lowered completely and the area looks dramatically different. With the help of rain and sun, water level management can be a success.

### Moist Soil Management

Water levels are raised and lowered at different times of the year to enhance nesting and rearing habitat, promote the establishment of desirable plants, control undesirable plants, create mudflats, and flood seasonal feeding areas for migrating water birds. When water levels are lowered in early summer, the aim is to create mud flats. This attracts hundreds of shorebirds that feed on invertebrates in an event dubbed, "the Addison phenomenon." Plants, such as smartweed and nutsedge, sprout in the mud flats and provide a critical food source in the autumn when the area is flooded again. Many invertebrates remain on the stems and leaves over winter and provide an important source of protein and calcium for waterfowl the following spring. Protein and calcium are needed by female birds for egg development.

### Artificial Nest Structures

Nest boxes for cavity-dwelling waterfowl, such as wood ducks and hooded mergansers, have been constructed around the WMA. You may also see nesting tubs for Canada geese. Nesting structures boost reproductive success.

# Activities at Dead Creek

## Hunting, Fishing, and Trapping

Upland hunting for squirrel, deer, rabbit, grouse, and woodcock can be enjoyed in season. Dead Creek also provides fishing opportunities for bullhead and yellow perch. Check with the current Vermont law digests for season dates and bag limits.

Waterfowl hunting for ducks, Canada geese, and snow geese is available on the open portions of the WMA, in season. Hunting on the *goose management area* is by permit only. Inquire at the Dead Creek office for information. Trespassing on the refuge for any reason is strictly forbidden. Hunting on and access to the goose management area is by permit only. Please check maps and signage to determine the boundaries of the *refuge* and *goose management area*.



## Boating

Dead Creek is a popular canoeing and kayaking area. In general, most of the Creek is too shallow for motors. There are several creek access points for boats, which allow easy access to almost any section of the WMA. Please respect *refuge* and *goose management area* boundaries. To minimize disturbance of nesting birds from April through June avoid approaching shorelines along narrow wetland channels.



## Bird Watching

Because of the great diversity of habitat types and active management, the WMA offers some of the best birding in Vermont. In spring, many species of waterfowl and songbirds stop on their way north. From May to July, most birds are nesting and raising young.

Keep your distance from all nests and nesting structures; use binoculars to observe from a distance. Look for duck and goose nesting structures, as well as osprey nest platforms along the creek. Wading birds, especially great blue herons, may be seen throughout the summer. In late summer and early fall, mud flats are good places to find shorebirds during their long migration south.

Waterfowl migrations begin in late September and continue through November. While the WMA once



attracted around 20,000 snow geese each autumn, shifts in migration routes have reduced that number to about 5,000. They can be seen from the viewing area along Route 17, and their numbers typically peak from late October to early November.

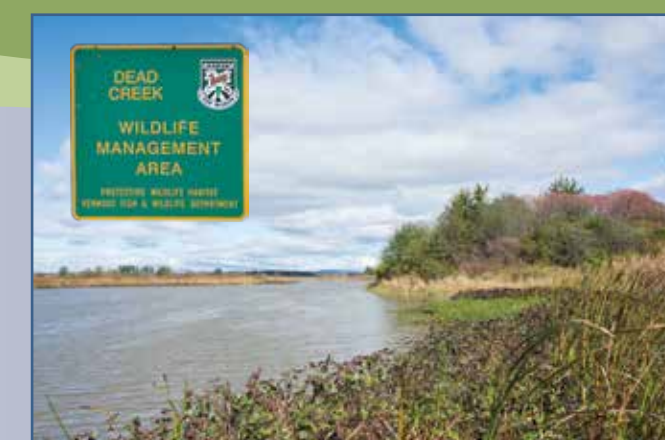
Winter months are quieter, but can be a good time to view raptors such as rough-legged hawks and snowy owls. Look for flocks of snow buntings and horned larks along the gravel roads and field edges.

A checklist is available at the Visitor Center for enthusiastic birders.



## Walking

The maintenance roads of the East and West Branches offer pleasant walking just beyond the gates. Along the West Branch, you will encounter a clayplain forest. Walking down the East Branch, you will see a clayplain forest interspersed with old fields. Botanists may enjoy studying the plants in the forests, while wildlife enthusiasts may encounter turtles, snakes, frogs, salamanders, and a variety of songbirds. Trespassing on the refuge and goose management area without a permit, for any reason, is strictly forbidden.

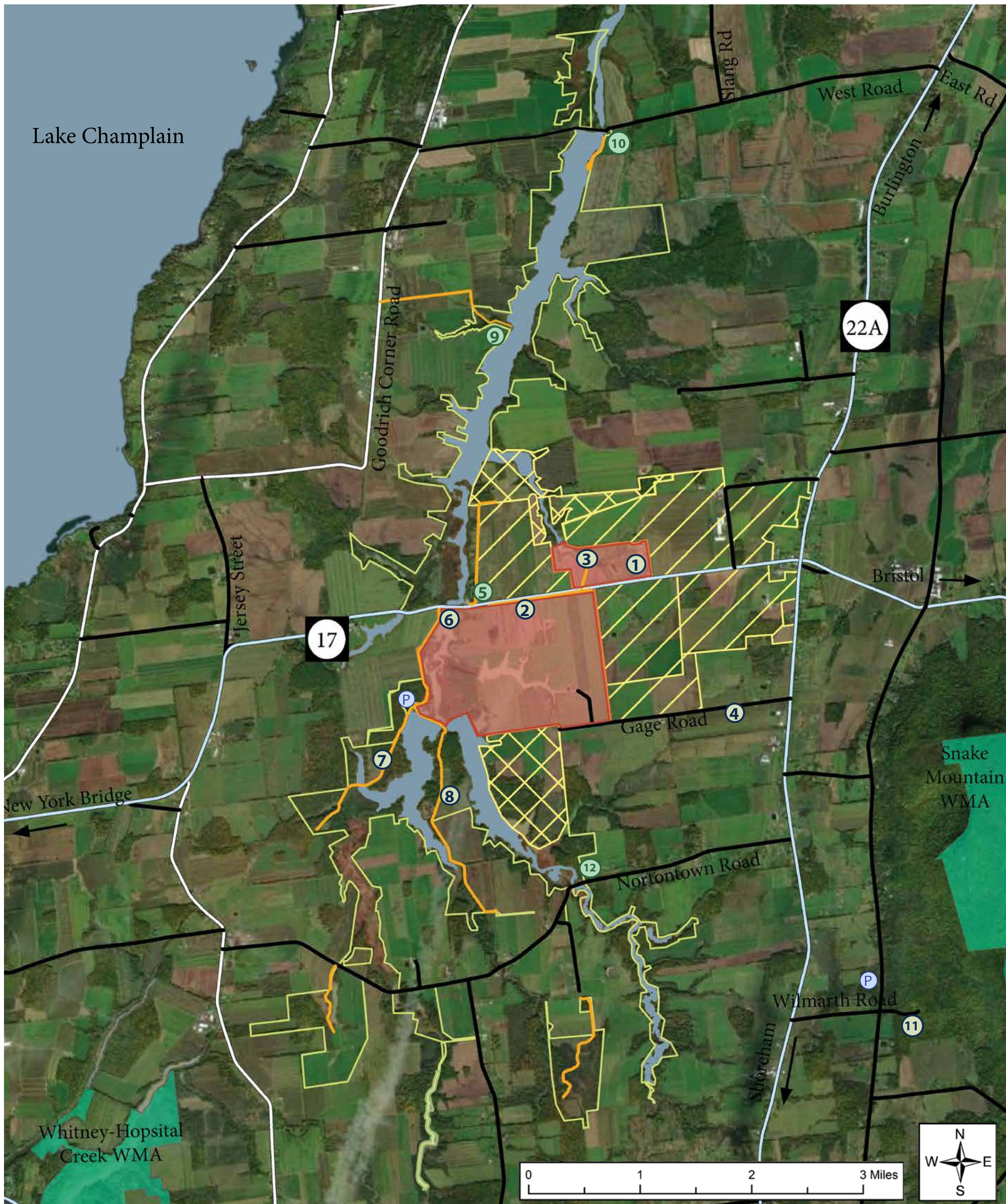


Dead Creek Wildlife Management Area  
Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department  
966 Route 17, Addison, VT 05491  
Office: (802) 759-2398  
Visitor Center: (802) 759-2397  
www.vtfishandwildlife.com



Your purchase of a Habitat Stamp supports conservation in Vermont.





- ① **Visitor Center.** Explore exhibits about conservation, history, ecology, and wildlife-based recreation. Talk with staff about birds, mammals, plants, and points of interest. Take a walk on the interpretive trail to learn what you can do in your own back yard to help wildlife. This is a great starting point for your Dead Creek WMA visit.
- ② **Refuge Viewing Area.** An easily-accessible pull-off along Route 17 is an ideal location to view migrating waterfowl in the fall.
- ③ **Woodcock Pond Viewing Area.** From a platform, view waterfowl feeding in the Woodcock Pond.
- ④ **Gage Road.** Travel to the road's end to gain another view of the refuge. This is a good location to see snow geese when they are in the back of the refuge. Other birds seasonally seen include snowy owls, rough-legged hawks, American kestrels, and nesting grassland species. *Do not walk past the orange gates or enter the refuge at any point. The old barn is also restricted and should not be entered for any reason.*
- ⑤ **Route 17 Creek Access.** Because of the *refuge* boundary to the south, boaters should ONLY go north from this access.
- ⑥ **Brilyea Road.** This road follows the western boundary of the *refuge* and is an excellent place to view wildlife. It leads to the East and West Branches of Dead Creek.
- ⑦ **West Branch.** Walk around the gate and follow the maintenance road for a close-up view of a clayplain forest. A variety of wildlife may be seen from the road. Boaters should note *refuge* boundary signs to ensure they do not launch into a restricted area. Check in at the Visitor Center to make sure your walk or hike will not interfere with seasonal hunting activities in the area.
- ⑧ **East Branch.** After crossing over the bridge to the next parking area, walk past the gate and you will pass through old fields used by field-nesting songbirds. Upland mammals may be present in the early morning and evening. From this location, both the East and West Branches are accessible to boaters. Boaters should note *refuge* boundaries. Check in at the Visitor Center to make sure your walk, hike, or paddle will not interfere with seasonal hunting activities in the area.
- ⑨ **Farrell Access.** This is a boat access for the downstream section of the WMA and is a good place to watch for great blue herons. Please respect the private property on either side of the road.
- ⑩ **Stone Bridge.** Watch for migrating shorebirds in August and early September during years of water level drawdowns.
- ⑪ **Snake Mountain WMA.** This trail head leads you up the mountain for a vista of the Champlain Valley, Dead Creek, and the Adirondacks.
- ⑫ **Nortontown Road Access.** This is a quiet spot from which to observe wading birds and other wildlife that use the wetlands. The Creek here is full of water lilies and other aquatic plants.

**Please Remember To...**

- Respect all private lands and *refuge* boundaries, and refrain from trespassing on them. State and private *goose management areas* are accessible only with appropriate permit.
- Keep your distance from all wild animals by using binoculars to view them, and keep dogs under control at all times.
- Respect the rights of other visitors and the variety of activities that take place at Dead Creek WMA.

**Map Legend**

- P Parking
- Access/Viewing Locations
- WMA Roads
- Dead Creek WMA
- Goose Management Area (Privately owned)
- Goose Management Area (State owned)
- Wildlife Refuge
- Other WMAs

