

Cornwall Swamp Wildlife Management Area

General Description

Cornwall Swamp Wildlife Management Area (WMA) is located along the west bank of Otter Creek in the towns of Cornwall and Whiting. It is part of a vast swamp in the flatlands of the Otter Creek Valley. Small acreages of agricultural field and upland hardwood forest occur. Swamp Road runs east/west through the center of the WMA. There is a small fishing access and parking area on the west side of the covered bridge crossing Otter Creek. All other access is by boat or foot, which is difficult at some times of the year due to wet conditions. Mosquitoes are very dense in season. The 1,566-acre WMA is owned by the State of Vermont and managed by the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department.

Part of the WMA is managed to protect and enhance white-tailed deer habitat, particularly a deer wintering area. Another portion is set aside for ruffed grouse habitat improvement. The remainder of the WMA is managed for mature timber and forested wetlands.

History

Otter Creek was an important travel corridor and fishery for Native Americans. European settlers cleared and drained some of the wetland for agriculture. They also logged the swamp, especially for northern white-cedar for cedar shingles and fence posts. Potash was extracted from the swamp for fertilizer.

The WMA is a conglomerate of many small land holdings. The first acquisition by the State was in 1965, and purchases have continued to 2002. Federal Land and Water Conservation funds were used for some of the purchases. A few of the parcels were bought by The Nature Conservancy, which transferred them to the State when funding became available.

Habitat Features

Cornwall Swamp WMA is part of the largest interior wetland complex in Vermont and, as such, is considered a National Natural Landmark by the National Park Service. The area is a seasonally-flooded forested wetland with a mosaic of tree species.

Interesting natural communities here are the red or silver maple-green ash forest, silver maple-ostrich fern riverine forest, red maple-northern white cedar swamp, and northern white-cedar swamp. Tree species include red maple, American elm, green ash, northern white-cedar and white pine. The understory is dominated by red maple seedlings and royal and sensitive ferns. Black ash, slippery elm, yellow and gray birch are also found. Shrubs include arrowwood, gooseberry, speckled alder, red-osier dogwood, nannyberry and high-bush cranberry.

There are a number of wetland plants, including duckweed, water-dock, water parsnip, marsh marigold, cattail, wild iris and tall beggar-ticks. Mounds support marsh fern, bedstraw, cinnamon-fern, woodbine, wild sarsaparilla, starflower and swamp milkweed. Purple nightshade forms tangles in the shrubs.

Included in this great diversity of plant life are some rare plants such as ram's head, showy and yellow lady's slipper, thin-flowered sedge, lily-leaved twayblade, green adder's mouth, eastern Jacobs ladder, swamp fly-honeysuckle, cuckoo flower and false cyperus.

Common Fish and Wildlife

Mammals White-tailed deer, raccoons, cottontail rabbits, gray squirrels, foxes and coyotes can be found in the swamp. Wetland mammals occur, including weasels, minks, otters, beavers and muskrats.

Birds Cornwall Swamp is an excellent birding site. Breeding ducks include mallard, black and wood ducks, hooded merganser and blue-winged teal.



The wood duck population in Vermont has benefited from an extensive nesting box program. USFWS photo.

The mixture of seasonally-flooded woodland and old fields provide excellent feeding habitat for waterfowl, shorebird, and wading birds when inundated. Shorebird migrants pass through in spring and fall. Upland game birds are ruffed grouse, turkey and woodcock. Several types of owls and woodland hawks inhabit the swamp. Willow flycatchers, eastern kingbirds and northern waterthrushes forage by the water's edge, while belted kingfishers patrol the river for fish. Many beautiful songbird songs may be heard such as the veery, hermit and wood thrushes, Baltimore oriole and warbling vireo.

Reptiles and Amphibians Salamanders that may be found are the eastern newt and red-backed and spotted salamanders. Several frog species occur including spring peeper, gray tree, northern leopard, pickerel and wood frogs. Reptiles one may encounter in the WMA are snapping and painted turtles, and milk and garter snakes.

Fish Otter Creek supports a warmwater fishery of large and smallmouth bass, chain pickerel, northern pike and brown bullhead.

To Middlebury
4.4 Miles

Hunting Rights Only

Cornwall Swamp
Wildlife Management Area
 1,566 Acres
 1:22,000

Middlebury
Cornwall

30

4867428
4866428
4865428
4864428
4863428

Scove Hill
521 ft

400

ROW

DOUGLAS RD

DELONG RD

SWAMP RD

H P

To Salisbury Station
0.5 Miles

To Whiting
2.8 Miles

Cornwall
Whiting

Other Creek

643496 644496 645496 646496 73°10'0"W