

East Creek Wildlife Management Area

General Description

East Creek Wildlife Management Area (WMA) is located in west central Vermont in the towns of Orwell and Benson. The property is along East Creek and is in two separate parcels. The northern parcel is most easily accessed by boat from Lake Champlain via the mouth of East Creek. The southern parcel has a parking area by the dam on Mt. Independence Road in Orwell, and also on Cook Road. A small portion of this WMA is closed as a refuge and is clearly marked and signed (see map). The 398 acres comprising the WMA are owned by the State of Vermont and managed by the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department.

History

Mt. Independence is just to the west of the mouth of East Creek. There was a companion fort to Fort Ticonderoga here, and the area was strategically important during the American Revolution. The fertile portion of the Champlain Valley drained by East Creek has been farmed since early European settlement. Parcels of land that comprise the WMA were acquired from neighboring farmers. The first one-half acre was bought from Wilford Brisson in 1955. The State sometimes bought good farmland and then swapped with farmers for wetland parcels. There are three dams on the WMA. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) owns much of the remaining wetland in the lower reaches of the Creek. Thus, between TNC and State ownership, much of the East Creek wetland complex is conserved.

Funds to purchase land for the WMA were provided by the Pittman-Robertson Act, which created a federal excise tax on firearms and ammunition.

Habitat Features

East Creek flows north, draining a low-lying part of the Champlain Valley. Mt Independence borders the west bank of the river mouth. Other small, steep hills separate the river valley from Lake Champlain. During glacial maximums, when Lake Champlain was larger, Mt Independence was sometimes an island, and East Creek a part of the lake.

The parcel along the South Fork of East Creek is a broad-leaf emergent marsh created by three impoundments, with a narrow upland border. The northern parcel nearer the mouth is a natural emergent marsh with water levels regulated by Lake Champlain. The area contains Vermont's largest narrow-leafed cattail marsh, with a good deal of wild rice as well.

Some uncommon plants occurring in the East Creek marshlands are lake cress, slender naiad, green dragon, sweet joe-pye weed, false hop sedge and cat-tail sedge. Ospreys are beginning to nest by the Creek. Bald eagles may also be seen. Remember it is against the law to harass or harm endangered species.

Common Fish and Wildlife

Mammals Beavers, muskrat and otter ply the wetland; while fox, coyote, mink, white-tailed deer and cottontail rabbit inhabit the nearby upland. Small mammals are numerous and include wetland species such as the star-nosed mole and water shrew.

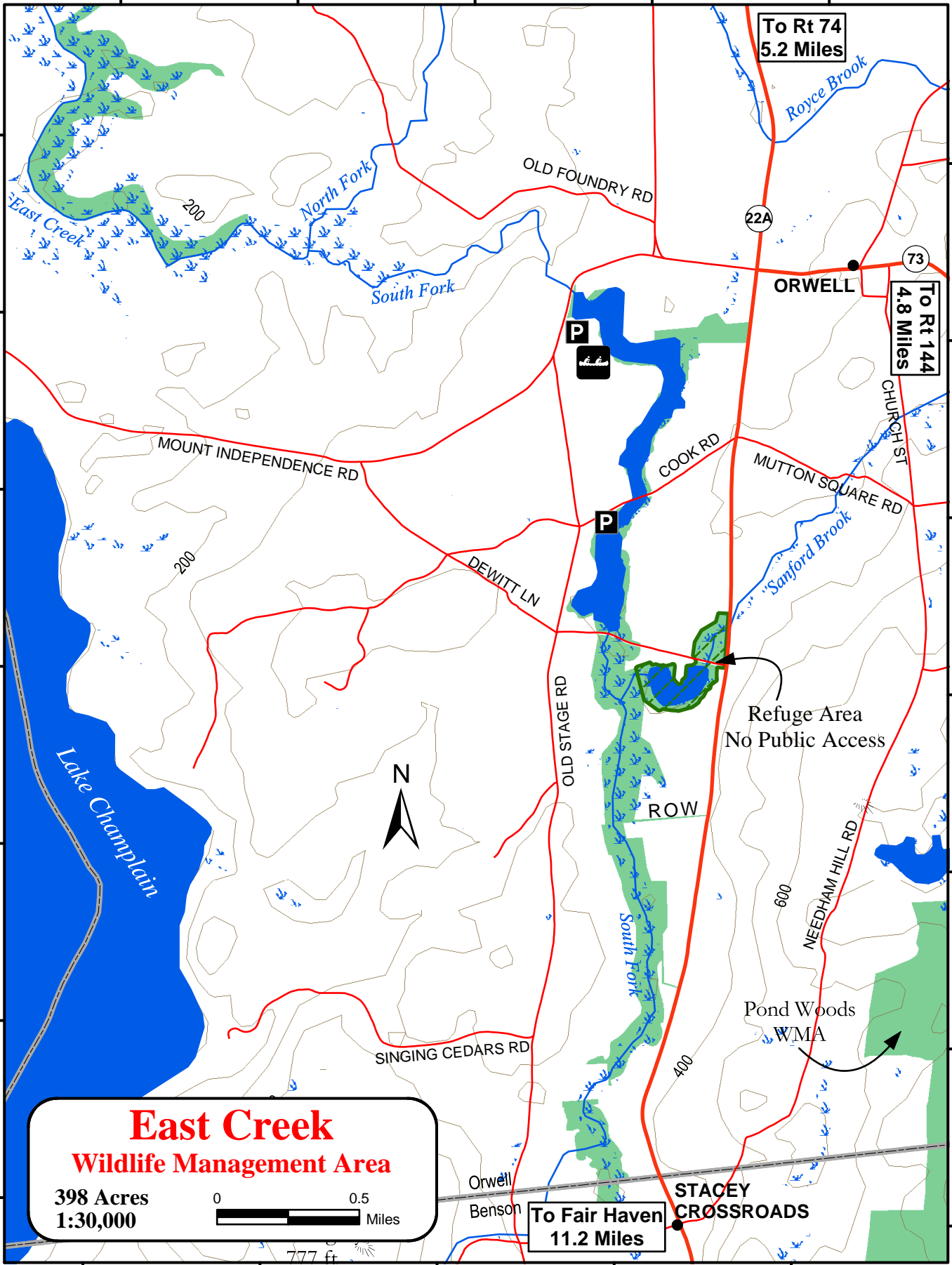
Birds This rich wetland supports a large number of birds and a great variety of species. There is good birding for wetland species including rails, American and least bitterns, green and great blue herons, common moorhens, ospreys and northern harriers. Canada geese, black and wood ducks, mallards, blue and green-winged teal, and hooded mergansers inhabit the marsh. Marsh wrens, red-winged blackbirds, eastern kingbirds and Baltimore orioles are some of the many songbirds that can be found.



Wetland plants growing in East Creek provide habitat for invertebrates, which are a food source for birds.
Bill Crenshaw, VFWD photo.

Reptiles and Amphibians The large aquatic salamanders known as mudpuppies may be found in East Creek. Also present are snapping, painted and northern map turtles, bullfrogs, green and pickerel frogs, and northern water snakes. Near the edges of the wetland, newts, northern two-lined salamanders, milk, smooth green, garter, and brown snakes may be encountered. Eastern rat snakes used to be found here but are now rare.

Fish Lower East Creek has a variety of warmwater fish associated with Lake Champlain. This includes largemouth bass, northern pike, channel catfish, yellow and white perch, and black crappie. Upper East Creek contains brown bullhead and smaller species such as the golden and black chin shiner have been found.



East Creek
Wildlife Management Area
398 Acres
1:30,000



To Rt 74
5.2 Miles

To Rt 144
4.8 Miles

To Fair Haven
11.2 Miles

22A

73

ROW

Refuge Area
No Public Access

Pond Woods
WMA

Orwell
Benson

STACEY
CROSSROADS

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633701

634701

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