

Fairfield Swamp Wildlife Management Area

General Information

Fairfield Swamp Wildlife Management Area (WMA) is a 1,376-acre tract located mostly in the town of Fairfield. It includes a large wetland complex with adjoining upland forests. It is owned by the State of Vermont and managed by the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department. Dead Creek, which flows north through the WMA, was dammed in the 1960's to create more wetland habitat. The swamp can be accessed from the parking area east of the causeway on Route 36 in Fairfield where there is a canoe put-in and wildlife viewing area. There is also a woods road for foot traffic near the dam at the northwest end of the WMA.

History

The basin that includes Fairfield Swamp was originally part of Lake Vermont, a much larger version of Lake Champlain which existed after the glaciers melted. When the ground rebounded from glaciation and the lake level dropped, the land along Dead Creek remained marshy. Native Americans probably camped nearby and used the biologically rich marsh for hunting and gathering. Since the land was wet, no European-American settlements occurred there, but farming occurred around the wetland's edges and is still practiced.

The Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department began to acquire the land in 1959. In the 1960's, the Department built a low-head dam on Dead Creek to enlarge the wetland area. The forested tract has been logged in recent years with the goal of improving wildlife habitat.

Federal Aid monies were used to purchase 15 parcels of the WMA. State Waterfowl Funds (Vermont Duck Stamp) were used to buy others. Two of the parcels were donated by the owners as part of conservation projects between the grantors, the Vermont Land Trust and the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board.

Habitat Features

Fairfield Swamp consists of a part of Dead Creek and its associated wetlands. All of the land is low-lying at an altitude of about 850 feet. There is an adjacent area of upland covered with northern hardwood forest. Within the large wetland complex are open water leads, sedge meadow, black spruce-tamarack bog, shrub bog, and cattail, deep bulrush and deep broadleaf marsh. There are also shrub and forested swamps, especially alder and red maple-northern white-cedar swamps. There is a fen in an area with very poor drainage. This variety of habitats is ideal for a variety of wildlife, especially water birds and amphibians.

There are several species of rare plants in Fairfield Swamp, especially in the fen. These include the State's only known example of autumn-willow, and the white-fringed orchid. More common, but still relatively rare, are the carnivorous pitcher plant and uncommon rose-pink. Because access in such a swamp is difficult, it is likely there are more

rare species that have not been discovered. Rare birds which nest in the WMA are sora, common moorhen, and least and American bitterns.

Two significant natural communities occurring in Fairfield Swamp are deep bulrush marsh and black spruce-tamarack

bog. Bulrushes grow in large mats over standing water up to 6 feet deep. They provide feed and cover for water birds. The black spruce bog is home to the rare bog plants noted above. There is also extensive alder swamp in the WMA, which provides shelter and nesting habitat for a variety of songbirds.



Common moorhens nest in some Vermont marshes. ©Jupiter Images2004.

Common Fish and Wildlife

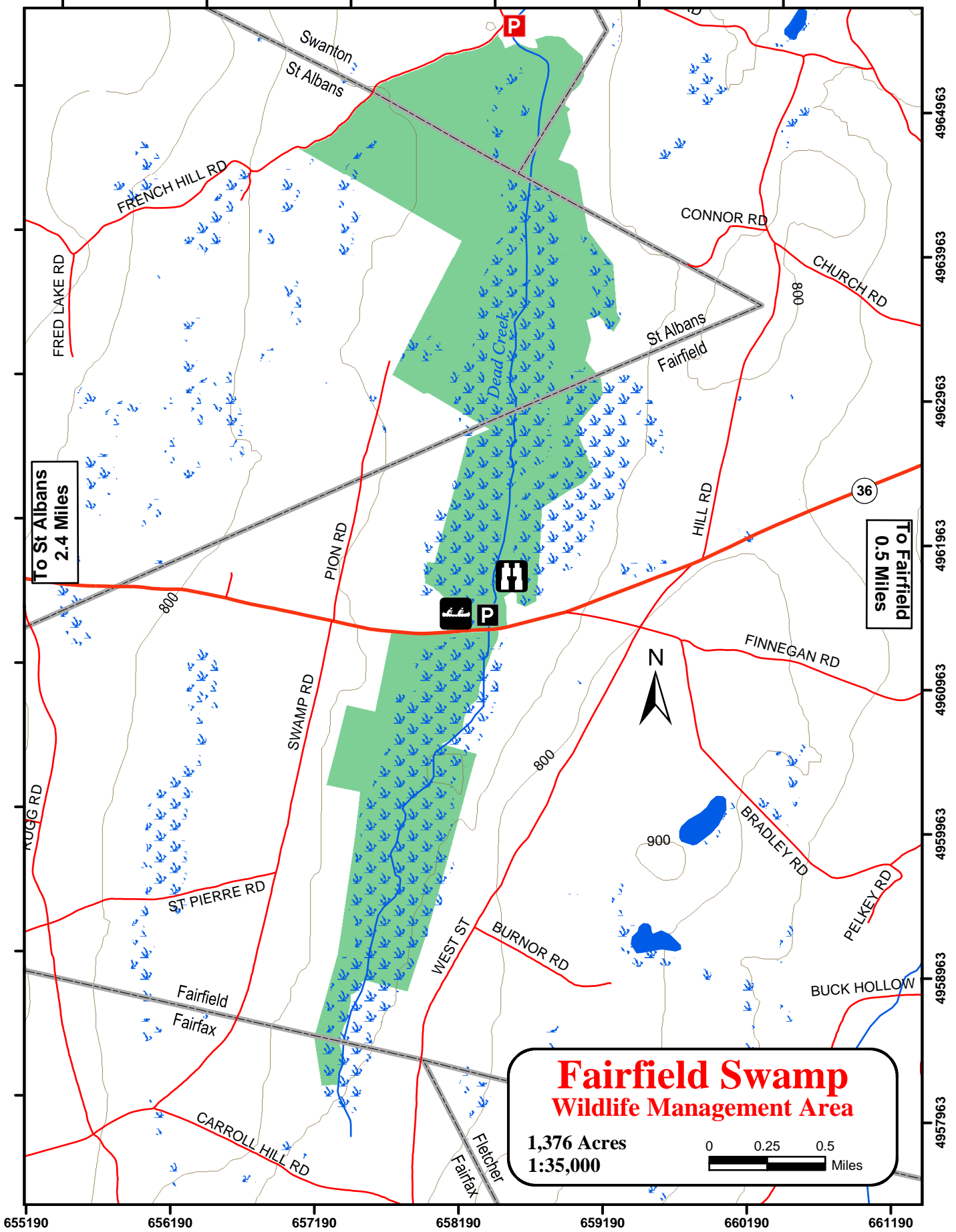
Mammals Larger mammals associated with wetlands are beaver, muskrat, river otter, mink and raccoon. Small mammals such as the star-nosed mole, long-tailed weasel and northern water shrew also occur in wetlands. Medium-sized predators such as fox, eastern coyote, fisher and bobcat prowl the edges of the marshes looking for prey. Snowshoe hare, white-tailed deer and gray squirrel are present in the upland forest area.

Birds Besides the rare birds already mentioned, there are many species of water birds and waterfowl present in Fairfield Swamp. Great blue and green herons hunt in the shallows. Ospreys, bald eagles, northern harriers, and several other raptor species may be seen overhead. Shorebirds stop by in their bi-annual migrations, and spotted sandpipers and common snipe breed in the area. Wood and black ducks, mallards, hooded mergansers, ruffed grouse and woodcock are common game birds.

There are several species of woodpeckers and flycatchers present, and a complete compliment of songbirds. The beautiful Baltimore oriole prefers wetland edges for breeding, and the belted kingfisher digs its nests into soft banks near water.

Reptiles and Amphibians One may find spotted and red-backed salamanders in the WMA. Bullfrogs inhabit open water stretches. Wood and tree frogs come down to the water to mate and lay eggs in the spring. This is one of the only places in Vermont besides the Northeast Kingdom where mink frogs have been detected. One may also find wood turtles in the WMA.

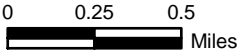
Fish The waters of Fairfield Swamp contain bullhead and pumpkinseed.



To St Albans
2.4 Miles

To Fairfield
0.5 Miles

Fairfield Swamp
Wildlife Management Area
1,376 Acres
1:35,000



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