

Sandbar Wildlife Management Area

General Description

Sandbar Wildlife Management Area (WMA) is located in the town of Milton and borders Lake Champlain on either side of Route 2. Most of its 1,560 acres are a refuge with no public access. However, the upland portion of the WMA northeast of Route 2 is open for public use, as is Delta Island. One may also boat along the Lamoille River and in nearby Lake Champlain, or drive along Route 2 and stop at pull-offs there. Sandbar State Park and the Sandbar Causeway to South Hero are other areas from which one may observe wildlife in the refuge. Boats may be put into the Lamoille River at the boat access off Cub Road, or into the Lake across from Sandbar State Park. The WMA is owned by the State of Vermont and managed by the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department.

History

The name "Lamoille" is supposedly a misspelling of the name Samuel de Champlain gave the River. He either named it "La Mouette" because of the many gulls he saw at its mouth, or "La Moelle", meaning "marrow".

There is evidence that Archaic Indians hunted small game, collected nuts, berries and roots, and fished in this area. Later there were permanent Abenaki, and possibly Iroquois, summer settlements along the river and on the shores of Lake Champlain. Here they hunted, fished and grew crops. The mouth of the river was known as the "Pike Place" because of the excellent pike fishing there.

When Europeans settled, they also occupied the lakeshore and riverbanks. Like other places in the Champlain Valley, agriculture was the main land use.

Sandbar was the first WMA in Vermont. The State legislature began buying land on the Lamoille River delta in 1920. Acquisitions have continued for over 60 years. Some funds were provided through the Pittman-Robertson Act, which requires a tax on firearms and ammunition. Some of the land was acquired by the Agency of Transportation and transferred to the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department as mitigation for the Route 2 corridor.

Habitat Features

The Lamoille River has built an extensive delta at its mouth in Lake Champlain, and this comprises the majority of the WMA. This includes an abandoned channel that extends through the wetland north of the river. The channel bed is at lake level and supports luxuriant aquatic vegetation. Earthen dikes were constructed to control water levels in the marsh.

This WMA is 70% wetland and 30% forested upland. The wetlands are a mix of open water emergent marsh and floodplain forest. The marshes contain water and yellow pond lilies, pickerelweed, sago and large-leaved pondweed, spiked water milfoil, bladderwort, duckweed, arrowhead species, water-plantain, cattail, three-way sedge, other sedge species, rushes, bulrushes, water-dock, water smartweed, buttonbush, winterberry, and one of the finest stands of wild rice in the State. Blue flag, sweetflag, least spike-rush and burreed grow along the shores.

The forest is mentioned in land survey notes from the late 1700's and was apparently much the same as it is today. Some of this original sandplain forest community still remains. Swamp white oak-silver maple forest occurs along the river in the rich alluvial soils - perhaps the largest stand the State. There are some nearly pure stands of silver maple. Eastern cottonwood, American elm and red maple are also found. The uplands are a mix of hemlock, white pine, northern white-cedar, red oak, aspen, gray birch, shagbark hickory, white ash, and red and sugar maple. There are some small fields and several large forested bluffs as well.

Wild rye is one unusual plant found in the refuge. The State-endangered osprey has made a dramatic comeback in the Sandbar area. State-endangered spiny softshell turtles sometimes are seen sunning themselves along the Lamoille River. Remember that it is illegal to harm or harass endangered animals. Viewing them from a distance with binoculars is recommended.

Common Fish and Wildlife

Mammals White-tailed deer, red fox, gray squirrel, coyote, beaver, mink, otter, muskrat and raccoon are all common mammalian species. Occasionally visitors may encounter a cottontail rabbit or even a moose.

Birds There is a full compliment of waterfowl and water birds on the refuge. Breeding ducks include black, wood, ring-necked and mallard ducks, goldeneyes and hooded mergansers. A greater variety of ducks pass through during migration, along with many shorebird species. Marsh-dwelling birds like soras, pied-billed grebes and common moorhens can be heard in the cattails. Great blue herons commonly fly overhead and forage in the shallows.

Songbirds include eastern bluebird, veery, wood thrush, blue-gray gnatcatcher, warbling vireo, yellow-throated vireo and Baltimore oriole. Upland game birds are American woodcock, common snipe, wild turkey and ruffed grouse. Several impressive raptors can easily be seen at the WMA. Turkey vultures are common. Breeding pairs of osprey have built large nests, some of which can be viewed from Route 2. Northern harriers hunt in the marshes. Bald eagles are occasionally seen here as well.

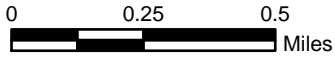
Reptiles and Amphibians Since there is so much wetland at Sandbar WMA, it is an excellent habitat for herptiles. Some amphibians that may be found include blue-spotted, spotted, red-backed and Jefferson's salamanders, green, gray tree and northern leopard frogs, bullfrogs, American toads and spring peepers. Milk, brown and garter snakes may be seen. The Lamoille River mouth is one of the only places in Vermont where spiny softshell turtles occur in addition to more common turtle species.

Fish Where it is allowed, one can fish for small and largemouth bass, walleye, yellow perch, brown bullhead, northern pike and longnose gar. Fishing is allowed in the immediate area of the Route 2 culvert (shore fishing only), and out in Lake Champlain beyond the refuge boundary.

Sandbar WMA is open to regulated hunting, trapping, fishing, hiking and wildlife viewing, except in the refuge.

Sandbar Wildlife Management Area

1,560 Acres
1:23,000



Lake Champlain

To South Hero
3.2 Miles

Sandbar State Park

Refuge Area
No Public Access

Refuge Area
No Public Access

Milton
Colchester

Great Back Bay

Round Pond

Lamoille River

CAMP KINIYA RD

BEAR TRAP RD

To Rt 7
2.2 Miles

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