

**VERMONT FISH & WILDLIFE
DEPARTMENT**

**FISHING ACCESS AREA PROGRAM
2022 MAINTENANCE AND CONSTRUCTION REPORT**

Submitted to:
Vermont Legislative Committee
House Natural Resources, Fish, and Wildlife

Submitted by:
Christopher Herrick, Commissioner
Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department
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2022 VERMONT FISH AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT FISHING ACCESS AREA
MAINTENANCE AND CONSTRUCTION REPORT

BACKGROUND

The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department (Department) acquires, maintains, and improves fishing access areas around the state. These areas provide public access to public waters for Vermonters and visitors alike. Fishing access areas are very popular, heavily used, and help connect people to the outdoors. If the Department did not have this program, most members of the public would have to pay for access and would have far fewer opportunities to recreate on public waters to fish, boat, hunt, or trap in Vermont.

The Department maintains these recreational facilities in order to provide easy and safe access to the public waters of Vermont. In calendar year 2022, the Fishing Access Area Program maintained 196 developed fishing access areas on 130 unique waterbodies. It also added 7 new access areas, including 1 on a lake where public access previously did not exist. Targeted users included 123,929 Vermont licensed anglers, waterfowl hunters, and trappers and approximately 28,000 registered Vermont motorboats that potentially used Department Fishing Access Areas. Additionally, there were tens of thousands of unregistered, non-motorized paddlecraft, and motorboats registered in other states that had the potential to utilize the Department's access areas.

FUNDING

The Fishing Access Area Program is funded primarily by Vermont motorboat registration fees and Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration funds (SFR). The Department received \$441,000 in FY22 from motorboat registration fees per 23 V.S.A. § 3319, which directs 34% of the fees to the Fishing Access Area Program. This was a \$19,000 increase over FY21. These state funds are used to match SFR funds which are generated from a federal excise tax on fishing tackle, boats, motors, and marine fuels. In FY22, the SFR apportionment for Vermont fishing access areas was \$599,500, which was a decrease of \$21,900 over last year.

Over the last decade, state and federal funding dedicated to the Fishing Access Area Program has exhibited an increasing trend. While there has been the occasional minor decrease in funding, both funding sources showed an increase in their 5-year rolling averages. Between FY17 and FY22, the 5-year average for Motorboat Registration fees increased by \$32,000 and SFR funds increased by \$39,700. Some of this increased funding can be attributed to the increase in outdoor recreation during the COVID pandemic.

Additional funding over this same time has come in the form of capital funding, averaging \$103,000 annually over the past 5 years. Capital funding used in combination with federal aid and motorboat registration funds continues to help the program make considerable gains in addressing the backlog of needed ramp repairs and dock installations, which have improved accessibility for all fishing access area users.

In the past 3 years, the Fishing Access Area Program was also the recipient of funding associated with COVID-19. In 2020, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act helped the Department adjust to the dramatic rise in outdoor recreation. The program was able to put over \$850,000 to use by expanding parking areas, improving boat

2022 VERMONT FISH AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT FISHING ACCESS AREA
MAINTENANCE AND CONSTRUCTION REPORT

ramps, building paddling access sites, and providing additional toilet facilities. Similarly, in 2021 and 2022, a \$5,000,000 General Fund allocation for outdoor recreational infrastructure further assisted the Agency of Natural Resources with improving recreational facilities. With this allocation, the Fishing Access Area Program benefited from a \$1,450,000 increase in funding for expansion and enhancement of public boating and fishing facilities.

INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS & MAINTENANCE

In calendar year 2022, the Fishing Access Area Program spent \$1,829,456. These expenses were for basic maintenance, staff time, and infrastructure projects, which included General Fund projects (Table 1). Annual operating expenditures totaled \$879,602 and ranged from \$1,550 for fees to lease access areas to over \$339,307 for program administration, including staff time and engineering design of General Fund projects. As usual, the bulk of the program's expenditures went to pay for facility operations and maintenance (\$499,068), which included lawn mowing, trash pick-up, parking lot and driveway grading, dock maintenance, snow removal, and portable toilet services. These expenditures resulted in an average annual cost of \$2,546 per fishing access area.

Over the past 5 years, the access program completed 72 infrastructure projects using traditional access program funds as well CARES Act and General funds totaling \$2,314,630 (Table 2). These projects ranged from installing new paddling access areas to major boat ramp construction. In 2022, 13 different projects were completed, including 5 ramp improvements (Joes Pond – Danville; Marshfield Reservoir – Cabot; Hoyts Landing – Springfield; Rock River – Highgate; Lake Fairlee – West Fairlee) and 9 paddling access improvements (4 each on Otter Creek and Moose River; 1 on Sunset Lake) (Figures 1, 2, & 3). There were also 2 projects (Fort Cassin and Colchester Point) that have yet to be completed, but are currently going through a significant design phase. Both sites provide critical access to Lake Champlain and the ongoing design process will help enhance year-round access and boater safety. General Funds paid for all of the 2022 infrastructure projects as well as a number of more routine site work improvements around the state. Total expenditures this past year were \$731,146.

One of the most significant programmatic changes over the past few years has been the decline in services available from the Department of Corrections Community Work Crew Program (DOC). This DOC program provided regular maintenance services (trash pick-up, grass mowing, sign maintenance, etc.) to over 190 access areas for the past 25+ years. In the spring of 2020 the crews were suspended due to COVID-19 and have only been able to provide limited services since late 2020. This has caused the Department to make a shift in how it conducts its weekly maintenance of these facilities by rolling back the frequency of mowing and overall maintenance visits as well as using a mix of skeleton DOC crews and private contractors. DOC crews have played a critical role in helping the Fishing Access Area Program maintain its facilities over the past few decades, but these services ended in 2022 and are unlikely to be restored.

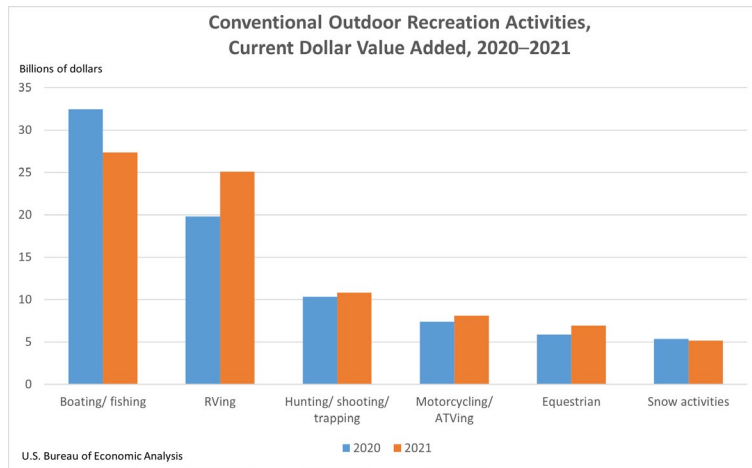
2022 VERMONT FISH AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT FISHING ACCESS AREA
MAINTENANCE AND CONSTRUCTION REPORT

In 2023, the Fishing Access Area Program will be moving to exclusively using private contractors for the first time. At this point it is unknown what the financial implications will be, but it is expected that costs will rise significantly. From 2015-2019, the average DOC cost for trash removal, lawn mowing, landscaping, and sign maintenance was \$63,795 or \$334 per access area for 191 sites. In 2021, just to pick up trash the cost rose to an average of \$777 per site for 111 sites. If that were extrapolated to include all 203 access areas, the cost would have been over \$157,700. It should be noted that this change in maintenance has not been lost on the public who frequently reached out to the Department to inquire why sites were not being maintained to previous years' standards. The Department will need to carefully balance operational changes with funding availability as we make this shift.

OUTDOOR RECREATION

Across the nation, the popularity of outdoor recreational activities rose dramatically in 2020 and 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Outdoor Industry Association (OIA) reported in 2019 that less than half of the US population participated in any form of outdoor recreation. In May 2020, that figure spiked to 81%. These changes were highlighted in Vermont by the record increase in hunting and fishing license sales in 2020, which remained high in 2021.

Fishing license sales in Vermont have dropped back down to pre-pandemic levels, but participating in fishing and boating remains extremely high. In 2021, according to the US Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA), the outdoor recreation economy was 4.1% of Vermont's GDP; second only to Hawaii (4.8%). The BEA also noted that boating/fishing was the largest recreational activity for the nation at \$27.3 billion and was the most popular activity in 27 states and the District of Columbia. Hunting/shooting/trapping was the third-largest activity for the nation at \$10.8 billion and was the most popular activity in two states. Vermont's access areas provide for all of these extremely popular activities and show that there is a high return on the state's investment in outdoor recreation.



2022 VERMONT FISH AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT FISHING ACCESS AREA
MAINTENANCE AND CONSTRUCTION REPORT

NEW FISHING ACCESS AREAS

Over the past few years, the Department has been working to identify fishing and paddling access opportunities on Vermont rivers and streams. Unlike on lakes and ponds, launching a canoe or kayak on a river or stream typically involves launching in one location, floating downstream, and taking out in another. Therefore, the Department must identify multiple access points and ensure paddlers can float downstream from one location to another.

The Otter Creek in Rutland and Addison Counties and the Moose River in Essex County were identified for additional site improvements. This past year, with the help of a General Fund allocation, we were able to complete the design, permitting, and construction of 6 access sites, 3 on each river. All access sites were constructed on properties owned by the Department. In all but two sites, these improvements enhanced footpath paths to the water by constructing stone stairways or wider footpaths to provide safer access. In future years, the Department will work to connect with landowners about improving existing privately owned access points on the Otter Creek either through lease agreements or fee acquisitions. Additional access points will allow the public to paddle and fish the entire length of the creek from its source to Lake Champlain.

Another new access area that was constructed was on the west side of Sunset Lake in Benson. The Department has been interested in providing access to this lake for over 2 decades, but had continually run into obstacles. While this site does not provide motorboat access, it does provide opportunities for shore fishing and launching of paddlecraft by using an accessible boardwalk that crosses over a wetland near the lake's shoreline. The new parking area will also allow the public to explore the adjacent Pond Woods Wildlife Management Area.

LAND ACQUISITION

Larabee's Point Fishing Access Area

For at least the past decade, the Department has been interested in finding a site to improve boating access on the southern portion of Lake Champlain. With limited funding and much of the land on the market being unsuitable for a boat ramp, the search had been slow. However, late in 2021 the Department identified the Hinsdale property in Shoreham as one that fit the Department's needs.

This property bordered the Larabee's Point Access Area to the south and east. This access is also southern Champlain's busiest access area. By acquiring this property, the Department would be able to provide the public with the much sought-after space for additional parking without having to develop an entirely new fishing access area and build a costly boat ramp.

In June 2022, the Department acquired the 12.1-acre Hinsdale parcel using General Funds (\$247,587). The Department has since completed a topographic survey of the land and plans to begin work on a 100+ vehicle/trailer parking lot design during the winter and spring of 2023. Parking at this site is the sole limiting factor to making it one of the largest and most accessible boat ramps on Lake Champlain.

2022 VERMONT FISH AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT FISHING ACCESS AREA
MAINTENANCE AND CONSTRUCTION REPORT

Halls Lake

The Department is in the process of securing a property donation from a landowner on Halls Lake in Newbury. Most of the background work required to acquire the parcel of land was completed in 2022, but the closing will not occur until early 2023. The 0.75-acre parcel contains a small gravel boat ramp, and a 10 car parking lot on the opposite side of a public road. Halls Lake currently does not have any secured public access for this 85-acre waterbody, and this generous donation will ensure the public has the ability to access the lake in perpetuity.

CONTACTS

Any questions or comments regarding the Fishing Access Area Program should be directed to:

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2022 VERMONT FISH AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT FISHING ACCESS AREA
MAINTENANCE AND CONSTRUCTION REPORT

Table 1. Summary of all expenditures for Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department’s Fishing Access Area Program, 2022. See Table 2 for a more detailed breakdown of infrastructure improvements.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION	AMOUNT
Infrastructure Improvement Projects	
<i>General Funded (note: \$175,051 was for site work maintenance)</i>	\$ 906,197.22
Site Work Maintenance (i.e. gravel, grading, excavation)	\$ 36,153.91
Dock Maintenance	\$ 52,003.15
Weekly Grounds Maintenance	
<i>Department of Corrections Community Restitution Crews</i>	\$ 22,588.52
<i>Lawn and Maintenance Services (Not DOC)</i>	\$ 5,012.50
Portable Toilet Rentals	\$ 115,270.23
Snow Removal	\$ 55,150.00
Land Acquisition (<i>note: \$247,587.30 was paid for with General Funds</i>)	\$ 252,245.30
Purchase of building materials, supplies, equipment rentals, etc.	\$ 5,771.97
Payments for Public Access on Private Lands (i.e., leases)	\$ 1,550.00
PILOT (payments in lieu of taxes) or Taxes	\$ 3,568.29
Engineering & staff time – admin, design, & construction	\$ 339,306.96
Historic Preservation/Archaeology Consultation	\$ 7,690.00
Signage	\$ 3,372.33
Clean Water fees	\$ 6,012.12
Utilities	\$ 5,471.28
Permitting	\$ 3,728.00
Trash Disposal	\$ 2,852.99
Stormwater & Habitat Work	\$ 2,070.73
Miscellaneous Administrative Expenses (gas, IT, etc.)	\$ 3,440.48
TOTAL FISHING ACCESS AREA EXPENDITURES	\$ 1,829,455.98

2022 VERMONT FISH AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT FISHING ACCESS AREA
MAINTENANCE AND CONSTRUCTION REPORT

Table 2. List of fishing access areas infrastructure projects from 2018 through 2022. Projects were funded with either state motorboat registration, capital funds, or general funds and often cost-shared with Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration funding. ADA = Americans with Disabilities Act.

	SITE	PROJECT DESCRIPTION	COST
2018	Chittenden Reservoir*	New ADA dock (50 ft)	\$ 19,068.53
	Kehoe*	New ADA dock (50 ft)	\$ 16,575.51
	Lake Fairlee	New ADA dock (50 ft)	\$ 28,502.26
	Lake Morey	New ADA dock (50 ft)	\$ 26,025.01
	Lake Rescue*	New ADA dock (50 ft)	\$ 15,791.90
	Larry Greene*	New 20 ft dock extension	\$ 8,319.39
	Norton Pond	New ADA dock (50 ft)	\$ 26,982.53
	Crystal Lake**	New concrete dock abutment to make fully ADA	\$ 11,549.30
	Evanoika	ADA parking & path to dock	\$ 10,923.95
	Kehoe	ADA parking & path to dock	\$ 7,954.25
	Lake St. Catherine	ADA parking & path to dock	\$ 16,460.55
	Magoon	ADA parking & path to dock	\$ 8,020.00
	Larabee's Point	ADA parking & path to dock	\$ 7,216.00
	Chimney Point	ADA parking & path to dock	\$ 9,610.00
	Marshfield Reservoir	ADA parking & path to dock	\$ 11,500.00
	Whipple Point	ADA parking & path to dock	\$ 6,049.50
	South Bay	ADA parking & path to dock	\$ 5,148.74
	Seymour Lake	ADA parking & path to dock	\$ 2,246.75
	Big Salem Lake	ADA parking & path to dock	\$ 4,551.75
	Berlin Pond	New parking & carry-on access	\$ 25,590.00
Wenlock WMA	Constructed new paddling access	\$ 1,860.33	
Clyde River	Constructed stairs to aid in paddler access	\$ 1,860.33	
Rotary Access	Constructed stairs to aid in paddler access	\$ 1,726.32	
		2018 TOTAL	\$ 273,532.90
2019	Chittenden Res.**	New ADA dock (60 ft)	\$ 12,514.96
	Kehoe**	New ADA dock (north ramp) (50 ft)	\$ 13,818.06
	Larry Greene**	New 20 ft dock extension	\$ 8,932.61
	Lake Rescue*	New ADA dock (50 ft)	\$ 7,778.11
	Seymour Lake	Water quality project	\$ 2,029.52
		2019 TOTAL	\$ 45,073.26

2022 VERMONT FISH AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT FISHING ACCESS AREA
MAINTENANCE AND CONSTRUCTION REPORT

2020	Curtis Pond	New ADA low profile dock (40 x 8 ft)	\$ 27,122.54
	Bristol Pond	New ADA low profile dock (36 x 8 ft)	\$ 23,624.29
	Harvey's Lake	New ADA dock (44 ft)	\$ 26,331.17
	Shelburne Pond**	New ADA dock (48 ft) – dock was originally purchased for Lake Rescue	\$ 4,748.25
	Dummerston	New ramp on Connecticut River & ADA parking	\$ 111,390.00
	St. Albans Bay	Repave and restripe the existing parking lot to increase parking & traffic flow	\$ 98,667.00
	Allen Point	Road improvements (\$98,330.58) & gangway to ADA fishing platform (\$34,412)	\$ 132,742.58
	Keeler Bay	Parking lot expansion	\$ 52,408.68
	Horican's	Parking lot expansion	\$ 71,632.78
	Curtis Pond	Ramp dredging to improve boater access	\$ 3,500.23
	Kings Bay	Ramp dredging to improve boater access	\$ 43,882.94
	Larry Greene	Ramp dredging to improve boater access	\$ 13,201.26
	Malletts Bay	Replace and enhance dock anchoring systems for 2 docks	\$ 52,541.00
	NEK Access Projects	Enhanced access to rivers and streams for paddling and fishing (9 sites)	\$ 97,823.22
	Hoyt's Landing	Repave and restripe the existing parking lot to increase parking & traffic flow	\$ 51,853.38
	Dummerston	Enhance access road by adding gravel & crowning road; cut back brush & trees	\$ 20,520.00
	South Stream	Enhance access road by adding replacing failing culverts, adding gravel & crowning road; cut back brush & trees	\$ 11,705.85
	Lamoille River	Enhance the road by adding gravel & crowning road	\$ 4,884.00
	Van Everest	Enhance the road by adding gravel & crowning road	\$ 4,375.20
		2020 TOTAL	\$ 852,954.37
2021	Winooski River Streambank	Constructed stairs to aid in paddler access	\$ 920.04
	Marshfield Reservoir	Ramp dredging (construction oversight only; GMP funded)	\$ 5,498.72
	Malletts Bay	Dock refurbishment	\$ 47,247.60
	Great Averill	Ramp reconstruction	\$ 36,761.03
	North Thetford	Ramp reconstruction	\$ 46,207.11
	Colchester Pt	Ramp dredging	\$ 53,824.75
	Fort Cassin	Permitting & archaeology work	\$ 46,413.00
		2021 TOTAL	\$ 236,872.25

2022 VERMONT FISH AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT FISHING ACCESS AREA
MAINTENANCE AND CONSTRUCTION REPORT

2022	Sunset Lake***	Parking area & boardwalk construction	\$ 7,501.00
	Colchester Point*	Ramp redesign – engineering only	\$ 26,087.10
	Moose River Access	Constructed paddling access at 4 separate parcels (3 sites within Victory Bog WMA & one on Moose River Access)	\$ 52,962.82
	Otter Creek Access	Constructed paddling access at 4 separate parcels (Nielson Parcel & at the primary WMA, Kingsley, and Middlebury Access)	\$ 71,415.62
	Joes Pond	Ramp reconstruction	\$ 162,340.00
	Marshfield Reservoir	Ramp extension & creation of fish habitat (50% cost share with Forests, Parks, & Recreation)	\$ 63,782.45
	Hoyts Landing***	Ramp dredging (2 ramps)	\$ 224,300.00
	Rock River***	Construction of a concrete ramp	\$ 1,628.00
	Ft Cassin*	Design & archaeology work	\$ 22,928.86
	Lake Fairlee	Ramp reconstruction and ADA parking	\$ 98,199.96
	Statewide	Site work, general access area maintenance	\$ 175,051.41
2022 TOTAL			\$ 906,197.22

*Denotes only partial payment for work that was fully completed the following calendar year.

**Denotes project completion initiated in previous year.

***Project completed in current year, but payments will not be reflected until following calendar year.

2022 VERMONT FISH AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT FISHING ACCESS AREA
MAINTENANCE AND CONSTRUCTION REPORT



Figure 1. Otter Creek WMA (Mt. Tabor) – New stairs were installed on the WMA just east of Rt 7 to enhance fishing and paddling access to the creek. This site is extremely popular for both paddling and bank fishing. It is also a trophy trout stocking site.

2022 VERMONT FISH AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT FISHING ACCESS AREA
MAINTENANCE AND CONSTRUCTION REPORT



Figure 2. Joes Pond (Danville) – The existing ramp was shallow and had an 18-inch drop-off that was causing boaters to damage their trailers. A bladder dam was installed so the contractor could excavate the lake bottom to the appropriate grades and remove the lower portion of the old ramp before pouring the new concrete ramp. The rebuilt ramp is longer and deeper so it will provide boaters with a safer launching experience.

2022 VERMONT FISH AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT FISHING ACCESS AREA
MAINTENANCE AND CONSTRUCTION REPORT



Figure 3. Sunset Lake (Benson) – This boardwalk is part of a newly constructed ADA accessible access area that was constructed on the north side of Sunset Lake. The project included significant upgrades to a camp road that leads to a new parking area which will serve both the fishing access area and Pond Woods Wildlife Management Area. From the parking area, there is a short gravel trail which leads to the boardwalk and lake shore where anglers and paddlers can access the lake.