

**VERMONT FISH & WILDLIFE
DEPARTMENT**

**FISHING ACCESS AREA PROGRAM
2024 MAINTENANCE AND CONSTRUCTION REPORT**

Submitted to:
Vermont Legislative Committee
House Environment

Submitted by:
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Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department
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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 2024, the Fishing Access Area Program maintained 205 developed fishing access areas on 132 unique waterbodies. Targeted users included 125,549 Vermont licensed anglers, waterfowl hunters, and trappers and approximately 27,500 registered Vermont motorboats that potentially used Department fishing access areas. Additionally, there are tens of thousands of unregistered, non-motorized paddlecraft, and motorboats registered in other states that potentially utilized the Department's fishing access areas throughout the year.

FUNDING

The Fishing Access Area Program is funded primarily by Vermont motorboat registration fees and Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration funds (SFR) administered by the US Fish and Wildlife Service. The Department received \$416,711 in FY24 from 23 V.S.A. § 3319, which directs 34% of the state's motorboat registration fees to the program. This amount was nearly identical to FY23, with only a minor decrease of \$3,600. 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 FY24, the SFR apportionment for Vermont fishing access areas was \$572,741, which was a decrease of over \$64,000 from last year.

Over the last decade, state and federal funding dedicated to the Fishing Access Area Program has experienced some fluctuation. However, while both funding sources exhibited a reduction in FY 2024, the overall fishing access area funding is still trending toward a moderate increase. Between FY19 and FY24, the 5-year rolling average for Motorboat Registration fees increased by \$6,183 and SFR funds increased by just over \$65,500. Prior to FY 2024, when one funding source experienced a drop in revenue, the other funding source would balance out that loss with significant gains. However, for the first time since FY 2017, both funding sources experienced a drop from the previous year. Hopefully this is not a glimpse into future funding trends.

Over the past 5 years, another reliable funding source has come in the form of capital funding, averaging \$96,000 annually. Capital funding used in combination with federal aid or motorboat registration funds and continues to help the program make considerable gains in addressing the needed ramp repairs and dock improvements, which have enhanced accessibility for all fishing access area users.

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INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS & MAINTENANCE

In calendar year 2024, the Fishing Access Area Program spent \$1,076,574. These expenses were for basic maintenance, staff time, and infrastructure projects, which were paid for with a mix of Motorboat Registration, SFR, and Capital funds (Table 1). Annual operating expenditures totaled \$1,025,906 and ranged from \$66 for trash disposal fees to over \$314,021 for program administration, which includes staff time, training, and engineering design for infrastructure projects. The bulk of the program's expenditures went to pay for facility operations and maintenance (\$702,928), which included lawn mowing, trash removal, parking lot and driveway grading, dock maintenance, snow removal, and portable toilet services. These expenditures resulted in an average annual cost of \$3,429 per fishing access area.

Over the past 5 years, the fishing access program completed 53 infrastructure projects using traditional program funds as well CARES Act, General, and Capital funds totaling \$2,530,762 (Table 2). These projects typically include installing new paddling access areas, installing new docks, or major boat ramp reconstruction. In 2024, one project was completed, which was the completion of the Tabor Point ramp expansion on Lake Champlain (Figure 1). The only other project of note consisted of a final payment for dock project on Waterbury Reservoir, which was completed in 2023. There are several projects in development that take significant time to design and permit prior to construction. Three major improvement that will significantly enhance access to Lake Champlain include: Larabees Point – Shoreham; Van Everest – Milton; Fort Cassin – Ferrisburg. Additionally, there were three inland ramp improvement projects that were designed and permitted in 2024, which will be completed in 2025: Lake Eden – Eden; Neal Pond – Lunenburg; Shadow Lake – Concord.

One of the most significant operational changes over the past few years has been the loss of the Department of Corrections Community Work Crew Program (DOC). The DOC program provided regular maintenance services (trash pick-up, grass mowing, sign maintenance, etc.) to over 95% of the access areas for the past 25+ years. In the spring of 2020 the crews were suspended due to COVID-19 and were permanently disbanded at the end of 2022. This has required the Department to make a significant shift in how it completes its regular maintenance activities. Private contractors were hired, the frequency of mowing and trash removal visits were scaled back, and overall maintenance responsibilities were modified in an attempt to mitigate the projected increase in cost for hiring private contractors. For the 5 years leading up to the pandemic, the Department's average grounds maintenance expenditures were \$71,775/year, of which \$63,795 was paid to the DOC program.

In 2023, the fishing access program transitioned to using private contractors full time. Over the past 2 years, that cost has averaged \$180,475 which is a 250% increase over the DOC program cost. The Department will be evaluating different cost saving measures in the coming years to determine how the cost of this service can be reduced while not impacting public access or safety.

ACCESSIBILITY TRANSITION PLAN

To comply with the 2010 American with Disabilities Act Standards for Accessible Design

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(ADA Standards), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and Vermont's Public Accommodation law (9 V.S.A. Chapter 139), the Department recently finalized an accessibility transition plan at the beginning of 2024. The primary purpose of the Fishing Access Area Program is to provide access to public waters for the purposes of fishing, boating, hunting, and trapping, which all members of the public have the right to access for these opportunities. This accessibility plan is intended to guide the Department's efforts to enhance accessibility at fishing access areas across the state for all users. The overarching goal of this plan is to increase the number of compliant facilities to at least 50% by 2028 (Table 3).

The plan was developed to both inform users of accessible facilities and identify a process for enhancing accessibility over the next 5 years. In 2023, while the plan was being finalized, we improved 7 sites to make them fully accessible. In 2024, the Department improved another 13 sites, making them fully accessible. The majority of the work completed was designating parking spaces and access aisles with signage or removing minor barriers on access paths. At the end of 2024, 31% of all fishing access areas are now fully accessible.

FLOOD RECOVERY

The Department's fishing access areas are, by their very nature, connected to water. With the repeated storms hitting Vermont due to the effects of climate change, numerous Department facilities were damaged in both 2023 and 2024. That said, many of the access areas suffered only minor damage relative to our municipal infrastructure. In 2023, 11 fishing access areas suffered damage and only 3 sustained major damage, including Seymour Lake (Morgan), Gale Meadows Dam (South Londonderry), and Rood Pond (Williamstown). In 2024, 7 fishing access areas suffered damage, with Seymour Lake and Shadow Lake (Concord) sustaining major damage.

Due to the complexity of the Seymour Lake recovery work, no repairs had been completed before the 2024 storm. The project was modified following the 2024 flooding to incorporate the new damage, and repairs were completed in August of 2024 (Figure 2). Shadow Lake is the lone access area that has not yet been repaired and work is slated for late summer 2025.

The Department has been working with FEMA since September 2023 to document damage and restore facilities. This process is slow, but many of the sites have been fully restored and reopened to the public. The final cost of repairs to the fishing access areas is still uncertain, but could not have been accomplished without additional state resources and FEMA assistance, which were critically important to facilitate restoration of the damaged facilities.

NEW ACCESS AREAS

In 2023, the Department finalized the acquisition of a new fishing access area on the 85-acre Halls Lake in Newbury, which is popular for year-round fishing as well as boating during the open water season. The property had functioned as an informal public boat ramp for decades, but is now officially a Department-owned fishing access area. This brings the total number of Department operated facilities where the public can access Vermont's waters to 205.

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CONTACTS

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

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Table 1. Summary of all expenditures for Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department’s Fishing Access Area Program, CY2024. *See Table 2 for a more detailed breakdown of infrastructure improvements.*

PROJECT DESCRIPTION	AMOUNT
INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS	
<i>Access Area Program funded</i>	\$ 35,000.00
<i>Capital funded</i>	\$ 2,507.23
OPERATING EXPESNSES	
<i>Site Work Maintenance (i.e. gravel, grading, excavation)</i>	\$ 249,400.24
<i>Dock Maintenance</i>	\$ 51,181.71
<i>Weekly Grounds Maintenance</i>	\$ 192,064.57
<i>Portable Toilet Rentals</i>	\$ 107,321.33
<i>Snow Removal</i>	\$ 42,711.75
<i>Land Acquisition</i>	\$ 8,957.00
<i>Purchase of building materials, supplies, equipment rentals, etc.</i>	\$ 8,039.06
<i>Payments for Public Access on Private Lands (i.e., leases)</i>	\$ 1,550.00
<i>PILOT (payments in lieu of taxes) or Taxes</i>	\$ 24,621.96
<i>Engineering & staff time – design, construction, & program admin</i>	\$ 314,021.24
<i>Historic Preservation/Archaeology Consultation</i>	\$ 13,160.00
<i>Signage</i>	\$ 1,871.09
<i>Clean Water fees</i>	\$ 3,427.07
<i>Utilities</i>	\$ 5,736.83
<i>Permitting</i>	\$ 2,458.20
<i>Colchester Police Department (traffic control)</i>	\$ 7,015.50
<i>Trash Disposal</i>	\$ 64.58
<i>Stormwater & Habitat Work</i>	\$ 676.25
<i>Dam Maintenance</i>	\$ 2,500.00
<i>Miscellaneous Administrative Expenses (gas, IT, etc.)</i>	\$ 2,288.08
TOTAL FISHING ACCESS AREA EXPENDITURES	\$ 1,076,573.69

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Table 2. List of fishing access areas infrastructure projects from 2020 through 2024. 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.

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
	Horicans	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

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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
2023	Sunset Lake	Parking area & boardwalk construction	\$ 154,838.67
	Colchester Point*	Ramp redesign – engineering only	\$ 4,936.50
	Hoyts Landing**	Ramp dredging (2 ramps)	\$ 20,500.00
	Rock River**	Construction of a concrete ramp	\$ 100,918.40
	Moose River Access**	Constructed paddling access at 4 separate parcels (3 sites within Victory Bog WMA & one on Moose River Access)	\$ 11,627.76
	Otter Creek Access***	Constructed paddling access at 4 separate parcels (Nielson Parcel & at the primary WMA, Kingsley, and Middlebury Access)	\$ 19,959.50
	Tabor Point*	Ramp extension	\$ 32,925.00
	Bugbee Landing	Grant to town of Bradford for new ADA dock	\$ 11,500.00
	Lake Willoughby	New ADA dock (50 ft) with 24 ft approach	\$ 59,389.26
	Marshfield Reservoir	New ADA dock (54 ft) with 26 ft approach	\$ 57,359.26
	Waterbury Reservoir	New ADA dock	\$ 23,526.54
		2023 TOTAL	\$ 497,230.89
2024	Tabor Point	Ramp extension	\$ 35,000.00
	Waterbury Reservoir***	New ADA dock	\$ 2,507.23
		2024 TOTAL	\$ 37,507.23

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

**Denotes project completion in previous year, but payments not made until current calendar year.

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

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Table 3 – The Department’s plan for enhancing accessibility with a goal of making 50% of its facilities compliant by the end of 2028. At the end of 2023, 30 of the Department’s 215 facilities at 203 different FAAs were fully compliant with the Standards. (Table 2 from VT Fish & Wildlife Department – Accessibility Transition Plan for Fishing Access Areas.)

SFP = Shore Fishing Platform

Year	Total Compliant Facilities (at year’s end)	Cumulative Total	Cumulative Total Percent Compliant	Targeted # of Improved Facilities – Annually			
				SFP	Dock	Ramp	Parking
2023	48	48	22.3	6	18	16	8
2024	16	64	29.8	2	4	10	0
2025	24	89	41.4	5	5	11	3
2026	10	99	46.0	4	1	4	1
2027	12	110	51.2	2	0	8	2
2028	5	115	53.5	0	0	3	2
Total	115	115	53.5	19	28	52	16

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Figure 1. New ramp extension to the Tabor Point Access Area in Swanton on Lake Champlain. From top left (counter clockwise): end of ramp during low water showing a 8 inch drop-off; coffer dam surrounding the end of the ramp; new ramp extension formed and concrete being poured; completed ramp extension with coffer dam and filter curtain.

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Figure 2. The restoration of the flood damaged Seymour Lake Access Area in Morgan, Vermont. The yellow, in-water turbidity curtain contained all suspended sediment while over 4,500 cubic yards of silt and flood debris were removed from the boat ramp area.