



Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge Refuge Happenings

February 2023: *The Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge is presently located in twenty-two different locations in the four primary Connecticut River watershed states of Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Vermont. The Stewart B. McKinney National Wildlife Refuge is located in ten locations on the mainland and near shore islands along the northern shore of the Long Island Sound in Connecticut.*

We Grew



Photo Credit: USFWS/
Tom Geser

On February 17, the Silvio O. Conte Refuge grew by 290 acres with the assistance from the Massachusetts Audubon Society, Tom Geser with USFWS Division of Realty, and the Friends of Conte! The Refuge now totals 39,755 acres of protected habitat that has been invested in the public estate for wildlife and people in the Connecticut River watershed. The newly acquired property is located in Becket, MA (Berkshire County) and Chester, MA (Hampden County) and was added to the Westfield River Division, which now totals 551 acres. As is the case with other land managed as a part of the Refuge, we propose to continue to promote appropriate, compatible, and traditional outdoor recreational uses such as hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, interpretation, environmental education, and photography. Stay tuned, as we will likely surpass the 40,000 acre threshold the first day or two of March!

For more information contact: Andrew_French@fws.gov

The Loss Of Leaders In Conservation



Photo Credit:
Wikipedia

We were saddened to learn of the recent loss of two conservation leaders in the Connecticut River watershed. Retired US Congressman (MA) John Olver and Retired Brigadier General Richard Mallion (NH), both passed away on February 23, 2023.

Without Congressman Olver's vision, leadership, and advocacy for funding from the Land and Water Conservation Fund to conserve land, the Fort River Division of the Silvio O. Conte Refuge and other Refuge conserved land in his Congressional District, would not have been possible. The Fort River Division hosts the universally accessible Fort River Birding and Nature Trail, which is also designated as a National Recreation Trail. The Division supports nearly 35,000 annual visits and is a popular destination for all ages and abilities in the Pioneer Valley. Brigadier General Richard Mallion was instrumental in the establishment of the Pondicherry Division of the Silvio O. Conte Refuge, which includes the universally accessible Mud Pond National Recreation Trail, a National Natural Landmark, and the first Audubon Important Bird Area in New Hampshire. General Mallion was a founding member of the Friends of Conte and served as a President. He was truly an inspiration and a forceful advocate for conservation for wildlife and people.

While we have lost two conservation leaders, their efforts will benefit wildlife and people in perpetuity.

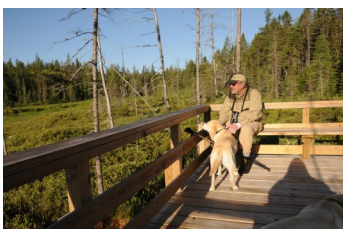


Photo Credit:
D. Govatski

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February 2023

Conservation Planning Meeting With State of Vermont



In February, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service staff met with Vermont Agency of Natural Resources and Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife staff to discuss land conservation and ongoing partnerships in the state. This year marks the 25th anniversary of the establishment of the Nulhegan Basin Division in Northern Vermont. Topics of the meeting included aquatic organism passage and restoration of brook trout habitat, Canada lynx monitoring, American woodcock habitat utilization/migration research, moose population research, and spruce grouse and ground nesting bird habitat restoration and management. The USFWS and VTDFW have partnered on numerous wildlife conservation projects that have occurred over the course of the past quarter century.

For more information contact: Steve_Agius@fws.gov

Photo Credit: State of Vermont

Snowmobile Season in the North Country



Due to unusually warm weather for the month of December and into early January, most of the Nulhegan Basin and Pondicherry had limited amounts of snow cover. In late January more seasonal weather arrived, which provided enough snow for the refuge's roads and trails at the Nulhegan Basin and Pondicherry to be groomed for snowmobiles. Roughly 30 miles of the roads and trails at the Nulhegan Basin and Pondicherry are groomed as part of the Vermont and New Hampshire's snowmobile trail system. The refuge receives a considerable amount of visitation in the winter months from winter enthusiasts.

Photo Credit:
SnowmobileVAST

For more information contact: Steve_Agius@fws.gov



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

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Winter School Vacation Week At The Springfield Science Museum



Photo Credit: USFWS

Over the course of two fun-filled days, four hundred and twenty-five people participated in interactive activities at the Conte table at the Springfield Science Museum! Park Ranger Tasha Daniels challenged visitors to guess the types of local animal pelts that were displayed at the table. Daniels also encouraged visitors to play the Animal Tracking game, in which participants had to identify the different photos of animals' tracks. As a prize, visitors earned an animal tracking card that they could take home to use for future outdoor adventures.

For more information contact: Tasha_Daniels@fws.gov

Woodcock Entertain Refuge Visitors



Photo Credit: USFWS

Due to extremely mild winter on coastal Connecticut, McKinney Refuge scheduled its annual woodcock interpretive programs earlier this year. On Sunday February 26th, a small crowd filled the room at the refuge's headquarters to view a natural history presentation by master naturalist and woodcock expert Pati Laudano. After the presentation, Pati and Refuge Ranger Shaun Roche answered questions about the birds, followed by the group moving outdoors to see woodcocks in flight. The birds did not disappoint the crowd, as no fewer than four males were heard "peenting" and doing their ritual courtship flights. In addition, two females were seen observing the flights of the males. Visitors were ecstatic, and refuge staff are hopeful that spring 2023 will produce woodcock chicks on the refuge. The same program will be conducted again on Saturday, March 11th for anyone in the area who missed out.

For more information contact: Shaun_Roche@fws.gov

Keeping Up With The Fences



Photo Credit: USFWS

Conte Partners Biologist Dave Sagan tested electric fences for voltage at the Fannie Stebbins Unit this month. Electric fences were installed to protect trees from White-tailed deer, which browse and rub the trees. Native trees were planted in five fields that were once farmed to restore the floodplain forest along the Connecticut River.

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A Jump Start On Invasive Species Control



Conte Partners Biologist Dave Sagan met a group of volunteers interested in helping refuge staff control invasive plants at the Fannie Stebbins Unit in Massachusetts. After a brief orientation, Dave gave the group a tour, pointing out the most important areas to protect. He suggested ways they could assist refuge staff to control invasive plants, and recommended species of plants on which to focus.

For more information contact: David_Sagan@fws.gov

Photo Credit: USFWS

Refuge Maintenance In Connecticut



Refuge Staff took advantage of the warm weather in early February to post refuge boundary signs and update the kiosk information at the Brainard Quarry property in Haddam Neck, Connecticut.

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Photo Credit: USFWS