



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

## Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge

### Refuge Happenings

**January 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.*

### Aquatic Plant Inventory



Photo Credit: John Rowe

In 2022, an aquatic plant inventory was conducted at two Divisions of the Conte Refuge. The final report, maps and spatial data that was completed for the aquatic inventory of various ponds within Pondicherry and Nulhegan Basin Divisions highlights the high ecological condition and value of these habitats. The inventory documented approximately 47 species of aquatic vascular plants across all sites, plus a few aquatic mosses and macroalgae. Bladderwort diversity was highest within Lewis Pond of the Nulhegan Division, while pondweeds, sedges and cattails were the most species rich within water bodies of the Pondicherry Division. The report notes that Lewis Pond supports 9 species of aquatic flora that are absent from the Pondicherry Division, including several abundant state-listed rare species. The authors suggest that this is due to Lewis Pond's sandy bottom and oligotrophic, non-tannic waters compared to Pondicherry's predominantly organic substrate and dystrophic, highly tannic waters. Fortunately, no aquatic invasive species were documented in any of the surveyed water bodies. An introduction of an aquatic invasive plant would be a detriment to these ecosystems. This report illustrates the ecological integrity of these habitats, and the importance of being proactive to limit the spread of invasive species.

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### Snowmobile Season in the North Country



Photo Credit: SnowmobileVAST

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.

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### Taking Archery Indoors In Winter



Photo Credit: USFWS

Refuge visitor service staff brought archery indoors this winter, with the hover ball blow up archery kit. Student at Springfield After School Programs learned how to hold and shoot a bow and arrow in a safe, fun and engaging program. Many students (and their counselors) had never held a bow and arrow prior to the events. Next steps will be to host the students at the refuge to practice on the outdoor range we recently built.

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### Lyndon Institute Bird Conservation Presentation



Photo Credit: USFWS

Refuge staff met with students in the January Term Bird Class at Lyndon Institute and spoke about wildlife management and careers in natural resource conservation. The students in the class learned about ongoing wildlife research at the Conte Refuge that ranged from wood turtle habitat utilization, American woodcock migration, Canada lynx surveys and moose/winter tick monitoring.

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### Energy Efficiency Upgrades



Photo Credit: USFWS

In an effort to reduce fossil fuel consumption and improve the efficiency of the refuge's infrastructure, an electric mini-split heat pump and hybrid electric hot water heater were installed at the Nulhegan Basin crew quarters. The two high efficiency electric units will dramatically reduce the refuge's reliance on fuel oil and reduce the operating costs associated with heating the crew quarters.

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