



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

## Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge

### Refuge Happenings

**June 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.*

#### Planting For Pollinators And People



Photo Credit: USFWS

Conte Staff joined partner agency KNOX, Inc., along with students from Prince Technical High School in Hartford, CT, to install pollinator plants in one of KNOX's 21 community gardens. The plants will increase the number of pollinators in the plot, which in turn, will help the production of vegetables and fruits. Students worked hard planting, and were also entertained by the wildlife found in the garden beds. It's a win for pollinators, who need more habitat, and a win for people, with increased fruit and vegetable production.

For more information contact: [Jennifer\\_Lapis@fws.gov](mailto:Jennifer_Lapis@fws.gov)

#### Nulhegan Basin As An Outdoor Classroom



Photo Credit: J. Rancourt

A local homeschool group enjoyed learning about refuge habitats and wildlife at the Nulhegan Basin Division in Vermont, on a rainy spring morning. They explored the exhibits and walked the Nulhegan River Trail to learn about ephemerals and birds, and had a chance to ask a biologist questions.

For more information contact: [Rachel\\_Cliche@fws.gov](mailto:Rachel_Cliche@fws.gov)

#### Water Chestnut Be Gone!



Photo Credit: Friends of Fannie Stebbins

Conte staff worked with volunteers and The Friends of Fannie Stebbins to hand pull the invasive aquatic plant water chestnut, adjacent to the refuge along Pondsides Rd in Longmeadow MA. Twelve volunteers spent a morning hand pulling 2,500 plants to prevent the water chestnut going to seed and spreading to other water bodies. We have three more pulling events scheduled this summer to hand pull and monitor this site.

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## Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge

June 2023

### Parking Expanded At Pondicherry



The Town of Whitefield Public Works Department completed a 10 car expansion to the Airport Road Trailhead on the Pondicherry Division. The expansion was to alleviate parking along Airport Road when the regular trailhead fills up. The trailhead is also used by bicyclists on the Cross New Hampshire Adventure Trail, and occasional horseback riders who take up multiple parking spots for their horse trailers.

For more information contact: [Rachel\\_Cliche@fws.gov](mailto:Rachel_Cliche@fws.gov)

Photo Credit: D. Govatski

### Experiential Learning At Pondicherry Division



Instructor Matt Tarr from the UNH Extension Wildlife Program used the Pondicherry Division in New Hampshire as part of a 12-week bird identification, ecology and habitat course. The course included weekly online sessions, as well as weekly field trips held throughout the state of New Hampshire. The course enrolled 250 students, with 85 different field trips to choose from. Field trips were limited to 12-15 students. Three field trips were held at the Pondicherry Division. The course is very popular, and next year's course enrollment will open in January 2024, with online classes starting in early April.

For more information contact: [Rachel\\_Cliche@fws.gov](mailto:Rachel_Cliche@fws.gov)

Photo Credit: D. Govatski

### Big Brothers Big Sisters Bond At the Pond



On the first full day of summer, a group from the Big Brothers, Big Sisters Organization visited the Fort River Division for an evening of pond exploration and fun in the outdoors. The program was also sponsored in partnership with Kestrel Land Trust whose staff and volunteers attended and helped to coordinate the event. Ten young people and their accompanying adults laughed and squealed out loud as they caught frogs, watched birds, and got muddy and wet in the Refuge's education pond. Several of the participants had attended these events before, and had such a good time they couldn't wait to come back.

For More information contact: [Jennifer\\_Lapis@fws.gov](mailto:Jennifer_Lapis@fws.gov)

Photo Credit: USFWS



## Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge

June 2023

### Refuge Biologist Co-Publishes Journal Article About Snowshoe Hare



Photo Credit: USWS

Conte Refuge wildlife biologist Rachel Cliché recently co-published a journal article about snowshoe hare. ***A Great Escape: resource availability and density-dependence shape population dynamics along trailing range edges*** was published in *Ecography*. Understanding the causes of range limits is a fundamental theme in ecology and evolution. Populations along geographical range limits are often exposed to unsuitable climate and low resource availability relative to core populations. As such, there has been a renewed focus on understanding the factors that determine range limits to better predict how species will respond to global change. Using recent theory on range limits and classical understanding of density dependence, the study evaluated the influence of resource availability on the snowshoe hare (*Lepus americanus*) along its trailing range edge.

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### Northern Conte Youth Conservation Corps



Photo Credit: USFWS

The refuge's Northern Conte Youth Conservation Corps started in June. The five-person Northwoods trail crew will be working at the Blueberry Swamp, Nulhegan Basin and Pondicherry divisions. Their work will primarily focus on trail improvements and visitor access. In addition, refuge staff will teach the YCC crew about wildlife research, silvicultural practices, natural resource management on public lands, orienteering, and plant and animal identification.

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### New Hampshire Fish and Game Commissioners Meeting- Presentation



Photo Credit: NH Fish and Game

On June 13th, Conte Refuge project leader Andrew French and refuge manager Steve Agius provided a presentation to the NH Fish and Game Commissioners about the Conte Refuge at the NH Fish and Game office in Concord, NH. The public presentation focused on Conte's divisions in the state, the refuge's focal habitats and species, and land conservation opportunities in the state of New Hampshire.

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## Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge

June 2023

### Loon Biologist Visits Pondicherry Division



Loon Preservation Committee Biologist Michele Adams readies a kayak at Cherry Pond in Jefferson, NH before heading out to survey for nesting loons. Cherry Pond is a 120-acre natural pond in the heart of the 6,500-acre Pondicherry Division. A loon chick hatched on June 11th and was seen riding on the back of an adult. The tamarack tree behind Michele in the photo is growing on a floating bog mat. The Presidential Range of the White Mountains is in the background.

For more information contact: [Rachel\\_Cliche@fws.gov](mailto:Rachel_Cliche@fws.gov)

Photo Credit: D. Govatski

### Youth Conservation Corps Arrives



The last week in June started the six-week long Youth Conservation Corps program, where seven young people will be working on a variety of projects at both the Fort River Division, and in locations around Springfield, MA and the Fannie Stebbins Unit in Longmeadow. The teens live locally, and will be working on a variety of project from trail maintenance, to invasive species control, and even visitor service programs for younger students. At the end of the six weeks, they will all travel to Northern Vermont for an overnight experience and close-out session at the Northwoods Leadership Center.

Photo Credit: USFWS

For more information contact: [Jennifer\\_Lapis@fws.gov](mailto:Jennifer_Lapis@fws.gov)

### Let's Go Fishing!



Stewart B. McKinney NWR staff, Rick Potvin and Shakira Jinez, joined the community of New Haven, Connecticut for a children's "Let's Go Fishing!" event held at the newly installed fishing dock in Beaver Pond Park. The event was coordinated by Doreen Abubakar, founder of Community Placemaking Engagement Network. The dock was kindly provided by the New Haven Urban Refuge Partnership. Rods at hand, participants learned about the various species of fish found in Connecticut waters, as well as some of their special adaptations. Children learned how to prepare, bait, and cast their rods before trekking out to the dock to test their luck. Thanks to the event's various sponsors, kids and parents went home with their own fishing rods so they may continue to enjoy the dock all summer long.

Photo Credit: USFWS

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## Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge

June 2023

### Nesting Success On Sheffield Island



An American Oystercatcher pair is nesting on Sheffield Island! In order to protect the three eggs and give the chicks an area to rest, refuge summer interns put up signs and a rope fence around the nest, trying to encourage people to stay clear of these areas so that the oystercatcher parents can continue incubating the eggs and feed the chicks when they hatch. The shorebird specialist working on the project also informed the interns to not point at nests, because lurking fish crows can pick up the cue and then might disturb the nest.

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Photo Credit: USFWS

### Students Observe And Help An Ancient Species



This month, public school students on field trips at McKinney Refuge's Sheffield Island Unit in Norwalk, CT witnessed dozens of pairs of horseshoe crabs mating on the refuge. Ranger Shaun Roche used the opportunity to explain how large females partially bury themselves in sand and deposit hundreds of eggs, with the smaller males behind them fertilizing those eggs. Students also helped Ranger Shaun rescue several overturned crabs that were found "high and dry" on the beach and vulnerable to predation by gulls and other predators. With luck, the refuge will be home to many baby horseshoe crabs later this summer.

For more information contact: [Shaun\\_Roche@fws.gov](mailto:Shaun_Roche@fws.gov)

Photo Credit: USFWS

### Northern Conte Pollinator Surveys



Refuge staff deployed pollinator traps within forested, wetland and grassland habitats of the Blueberry Swamp, Pondicherry and Nulhegan Basin Divisions. These blue-vane traps visually attract insects for capture in a bucket of soapy water for identification at a later date. The traps are checked every two weeks to collect the insects and record information on flowering plant species and habitat conditions. This is part of a region wide effort to inventory pollinator species on refuges, with a focus on at-risk-bees. An inventory of at-risk-bees and other pollinator species will be used to inform management of habitats to benefit these species.

Photo Credit: USFWS

For more information contact: [Rachel\\_Cliche@fws.gov](mailto:Rachel_Cliche@fws.gov)



## Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge

June 2023

### Forest Ecology Working Group Tour

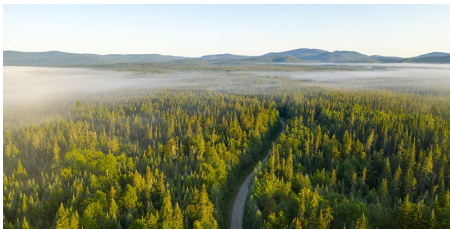


The US Fish and Wildlife Forest Ecology Group - an entity formed to advocate on behalf of forests within the Service - visited the Nulhegan Basin Division of the Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge last month. The visit allowed them to tour a number of novel forest management projects occurring on the Division, including forest degradation research and a large-scale climate change study.

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Photo Credit: Caleb Kenna

### Kingdom Heritage Lands Managers Meeting



The annual Kingdom Heritage Lands meeting was held at the Nulhegan Basin Division in June. The meeting allows State partners, private timber interests, and the Refuge to come together and discuss management challenges across their shared conservation landscape. Public access challenges were a consistent theme at this year's meeting, as landowners work to secure safe and compatible access to more than 100,000 acres of conserved land.

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Photo Credit: Caleb Kenna

### Senator Welch State Director Tour



In late June, refuge staff provided Rebecca Ellis (Senator Welch's state director) and Tom Berry (Great Lakes Fishery Council) a tour of the Nulhegan Basin Division. The tour included a discussion of ongoing wildlife research, forest management and aquatic connectivity restoration work on the refuge. Refuge staff highlighted how the Bipartisan Infrastructure and Inflation Reduction Act funds will be used for aquatic and terrestrial habitat management and restoration on the refuge.

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Photo Credit: Rebecca Ellis