



## U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge

## Refuge Happenings

**March 2022:** *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.*

### Happy 119th Birthday National Wildlife Refuge System



Known as the “conservation president”, President Theodore Roosevelt established the first national wildlife refuge on March 14, 1903, at Pelican Island, Florida, to protect brown pelicans from slaughter by market hunters. Now, 119 years later, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service manages more than 560 Refuges, conserving more than 95 million acres of land. With a least one refuge in every U.S. state, no matter where you live, you can enjoy nature at a national wildlife refuge near you. Visit one today!

For more information contact: [Andrew\\_French@fws.gov](mailto:Andrew_French@fws.gov)

Photo Credit: CBS News

### U.S. Secretary Of The Interior Visits Conte Refuge Complex



On March 2nd, we were honored to host CT DEEP Commissioner Katie Dykes, USFWS Director Martha Williams, CT Governor Ned Lamont and United States Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland at the McKinney Refuge! Refuge staff led them on a 90-minute tour of the habitats of Salt Meadow, saw a Federal Lands Access special funding project, and talked about the Great Meadows restoration. Thanks to all who helped host them for this important day. As the Secretary said on her twitter account: "I couldn't take a trip to Connecticut without visiting the Stewart B. McKinney National Wildlife Refuge." Thank you, Madam Secretary!

For more information contact: [Andrew\\_French@fws.gov](mailto:Andrew_French@fws.gov)

Photo Credit: USDO

### We Grew! Conte Establishes The Maromas Division in Connecticut



The Conte Refuge was formally established with a donation of Third Island on October 3, 1997. Since that time, the refuge has added property in 12 divisions within the CT River Watershed. After nearly 25 years and with the help of many partners, the refuge now contains 39,449 acres. This month the refuge officially established its 12th division, of a proposed twenty-two, after closing on a 23.5 acre tract, forming the Maromas Division. This could not have been accomplished without the aid and patience of our key partners, the Middlesex Land Trust.

For more information contact: [Andrew\\_French@fws.gov](mailto:Andrew_French@fws.gov)

Photo Credit: USFWS



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### Nesting Season Is Just Around The Corner



On Tuesday March 22nd, volunteers and staff from the McKinney Refuge went to the Milford Point Unit to put up string fencing and “closed area” signs in preparation for shorebird nesting season. Some of the birds that we want to protect include piping plovers and American oystercatchers. After the string fencing was set up, the group picked up litter that had washed in from the nearby Housatonic River. Thank you to Craig, Jim, Kenny, Michael and Frank for always being such a big help to the refuge!!

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

Photo Credit: USFWS/  
Shaun Roche

### Vermont Jr. Duck Stamp Contest Held At Nulhegan Division



Ellery Norwood of East Burke, VT has been awarded the Best of Show for the second year in a row, in the 2022 Federal Junior Duck Stamp Design Contest. Judging for the contest took place at the Nulhegan Basin Division of the Conte Refuge earlier this month. Ellery is a student at the Lyndon Institute and entered a painting of a mallard duck into the contest. Her winning piece will now compete in the National Jr. Duck Stamp Contest and will be included in an exhibit that will tour the U.S. this coming year. Congratulations Ellery! [Learn more](#) about the Jr Duck Stamp Program.

For more information contact [Steve\\_Agius@fws.gov](mailto:Steve_Agius@fws.gov)

Photo Credit: USFWS

### Pre-Season Trail Work At Pondicherry



In March, Conte Refuge staff moved dozens of tamarack bog bridge planks to staging areas at the Pondicherry Division in NH. The wooden planks were first transported with a snowmobile and utility trailer. Once the planks were unloaded at the staging areas, local volunteers worked together to carry the planks to sections of trails that will be upgraded by the YCC crew this summer.

For more information contact: [Steve\\_Agius@fws.gov](mailto:Steve_Agius@fws.gov)

Photo Credit: USFWS



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### **Building Experimental Bird Nest Boxes At S.B. McKinney Refuge**



Thanks to volunteers Jim and Terry for helping McKinney Refuge staff build new experimental nest boxes for the terns of the Falkner Island Unit. There are usually more than 6,000 common terns and over 50 roseate terns, an endangered species, that call the island home every summer. The birds need a lot of extra help this year during their nesting season, so our fingers are crossed that this new design protects them and their babies!

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

Photo Credit: USFWS/Shawn Roche

### **Conte Staff Assist With Herring Study In The Connecticut River**



Photo Credit: USFWS

Conte Refuge staff assisted the CT River Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office to deploy 28 acoustic receivers in the CT River, select tributaries, and coves in February and March. Acoustic receivers were attached to navigation markers and submerged mooring anchors, cabled to shoreline locations from the mouth of the river to the Holyoke Dam. Receivers can detect fish, previously tagged with surgically applied acoustic tags, as they swim past. In 2021, a total of 155 blueback herring were collected at the river mouth in Old Lyme, CT and were fitted with acoustic tags. In the first year, over 75% of the tagged fish were detected in upstream habitats and those data are being analyzed with the cooperating study partner, the USGS Conte Laboratory. This is the second year of the herring tagging study, which will provide important migration and movement information for management/restoration of blueback herring, including habitat use, run timing, homing tendency, and survival. The tags are programmed to “restart” at this time, before river entry, for those fish that are returning to spawn in 2022.

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### Field Trip To Fannie Stebbins



Photo Credit: Markelle Smith

The Conte refuge co-lead a field trip for the Mass Land Trust Coalition Conference with The Nature Conservancy and Mass Audubon at the Fannie Stebbins Unit in Longmeadow MA. The group met on a beautiful spring day to walk the area and talk about the partnership that created the unit and current restoration efforts. The group was lucky to see nesting bald eagles, a screech owl, and many species of waterfowl along the way.

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### Conte Staff Meet With Partners In Hartford, Connecticut



Photo Credit: USFWS

Mary Pelletier of Park Watershed Organization facilitated a meeting this month with Refuge personnel and community leaders in the vicinity of Keney Park, Hartford, CT. The gathering is part of an effort to explore the potential for a Hartford Urban Wildlife Conservation Partnership. Staff visited four sites and met with leadership at the Keney Park Urban Agriculture Education Site, Gully Brook at Love Lane, Friends of Keney Park at the Keney Park Pond House, and Ebony Horsewomen, Inc. Based on this visit, the potential for a partnership felt quite promising as we invest in our relationship with the community.

For more information contact: [Andrew\\_French@fws.gov](mailto:Andrew_French@fws.gov)

### Local College Students Learn Archery At The Fort River Division



Photo: USFWS/ Chris Dwyer

On March 25, members of the University of Massachusetts, Backcountry Hunters and Anglers Student Chapter participated in a FWS-sponsored event at the new Silvio O. Conte NFWR Archery Range. Students from the Natural Resources and Computer Engineering Programs at UMass learned how to shoot bows and quickly became proficient at hitting their targets. Additional opportunities are planned for this spring to help introduce others to archery, and provide support for them to continue.

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