



Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge Refuge Happenings

August 2020: *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.*

Exploring Urban Wildlife With Eagle Eye Institute



Photo Credit: USFWS

This month Conte visitor service staff teamed up with the Eagle Eye Institute to provide outdoor urban wildlife experiences for youth at the Holyoke Boys and Girls Club. Students learned about birding in their neighborhoods, the importance of trees in the city, facts about living in a watershed, and most importantly, how to take the time to observe all the small details about nature and the outdoors in their own backyards. With kids spending more time at home these days, we are hopeful they will take more time to appreciate the natural world around them.

For more information contact: Jennifer_Lapis@fws.gov

Raising The Roof At Fannie Stebbins



Photo Credit: USFWS

Conte Staff spent time this month adding a new roof to the overlook at the Fannie Stebbins Division in Longmeadow, MA. The roof will provide needed shade and protection from the rain for visitors, as well as during educational programs at the refuge.

For more information contact: Andrew_French@fws.gov

Invasive Control Assistants Getting the Job Done



Photo Credit: USFWS

Stewart B. McKinney NWR hired three invasive species assistants to help with invasive plant control and mapping on four of the refuge units. Dylan, Julia, and Josh are local college graduates who all have an interest in conservation. In the five weeks that the team will be assembled, we plan to enhance rare plant habitat, map several acres of forest and shrubland, open more area for our native plant pollinator garden on Outer Island, eradicate Japanese knotweed from Milford Point, and expand the pollinator area at Great Meadows by controlling autumn olive.

For more information contact: Shaun_Roche@fws.gov



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A Virtual Tour of Fort River Birding And Nature Trail



Photo Credit: USFWS

This month visitor service staff conducted our first virtual tour of the refuge with students from the Springfield School System. Working with Springfield Department of Parks and Recreation, we connected with 24 youth and seven adults through “Microsoft Teams” and led two live, interactive tours around the trail. The events were so well received, we were asked to continue the programs into the school year.

For more information contact: Jennifer_Lapis@fws.gov

Butterfly Walk Goes Virtual



Photo Credit: Alexis Yashin

McKinney refuge’s long-time tradition of doing an August butterfly walk went virtual this year, with ranger Shaun Roche broadcasting naturalist Tom Kelly on Facebook as he lead the educational experience. The highlight of the day was seeing a red-banded hairstreak (photo)– which was a first for many involved. Other butterflies seen included spicebush swallowtail, red-spotted purple, eastern tiger swallowtail, American lady, painted lady, wild indigo duskywing, monarch, and cabbage white, skippers. In total, about 350 people watched the walk. Special thanks goes to Tom and others from the Connecticut Butterfly Association who helped!

For more information contact: Shaun_Roche@fws.gov

Fort River Arena Gets a Facelift



Photo Credit: USFWS

A large storage building at the Fort River Division received a make-over this month with the installation of new siding and windows. The “arena” is used for storing large equipment for multiple Service programs, as well as tools and materials for Conte Refuge projects.

For more information contact: Andrew_French@fws.gov



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Bog Bridge Upgrades And New Trail Signs At Pondicherry



Throughout the month of August, the Northern Conte trail crew worked at the Pondicherry Division upgrading the bog bridging between Cherry Pond and Little Cherry Pond. In addition, the crew replaced over a dozen trail signs with new routed cedar trail signs. The Pondicherry Division continues to grow in popularity and the trail system at the refuge is experiencing an influx of foot traffic.

For more information contact: Steve_Agius@fws.gov

Photo Credit: D. Govatski

McKinney NWR Welcomes Back Volunteers!



Due to COVID-19, volunteer activities were suspended on the refuge for several months. During this time, refuge staff had to find other ways to accomplish many of the valuable tasks that our volunteers regularly perform, such as visitor education, trail monitoring and maintenance, shorebird protection fencing, and dock installation. Thankfully, this month the refuge is now welcoming back volunteers to return to some of these duties. Dozens of people eagerly signed up and took the COVID-19 and other trainings offered as a prerequisite for returning - and they are now "back on the job" in several units. Refuge staff are grateful to see them and to have them back helping!

Photo Credit: USFWS

For more information contact: Shaun_Roche@fws.gov

Invasive Species Control at Pondicherry



For a number of years, refuge staff have worked at hand pulling purple loosestrife from Cedar Marsh. By and large, the efforts have only had a minor impact on the spread of the invasive plant. Due to the fact that Cedar Marsh flows into Cherry Pond, there is a concern that purple loosestrife will spread into the pristine wetlands that surround this iconic body of water. This year the purple loosestrife was treated by Vegetation Control Services, and we are hopeful that this approach will have a strong impact at keeping this invasive plant under control.

Photo Credit: USFWS

For more information contact: Steve_Agius@fws.gov



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Grassland Management at Pondicherry



The fields at the Pondicherry Division are mowed on a rotating schedule to support grassland dependent bird species and to reduce the growth of woody vegetation. Throughout the month of August, after the breeding bird season had ended, Conte staff mowed various refuge fields. The fields will be in perfect nesting condition for the birds' return next season.

For more information contact: Steve_Agius@fws.gov

Photo Credit: USFWS

Putney Mountain Trailhead Kiosk



Conte Refuge staff have updated interpretive trail maps at trailheads and parking areas across the northern part of the Connecticut River watershed. In August, the Putney Mountain trailhead kiosk was updated with a new panel to highlight the various wildlife dependent recreational opportunities. In addition, a new rack card was developed for the Putney Mountain Unit and the rack cards are available at the trailhead kiosk.

For more information contact: Steve_Agius@fws.gov

Photo Credit: USFWS

Glossy Buckthorn Control at the Putney Mountain Unit



Glossy buckthorn, a highly invasive species of shrub, occupies wetland habitat at the Putney Mountain Unit. These same wetlands provide critical habitat for the Federal listed northeastern bulrush. In attempts to control the spread of buckthorn, last year we treated buckthorn with herbicides. Monitoring efforts this summer showed stump sprouting off the larger more established shrubs. We treated the site again at the end of August to continue removal of this species from this important habitat.

For more information contact: Steve_Agius@fws.gov

Photo Credit: USFWS



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Nulhegan Basin Habitat Management



Staff from the North Country Fire Crew and the Conte Refuge teamed up in August to complete a thinning within a young spruce-fir forest. Release cuttings of various kinds have long been known to help regulate species composition, improve crown development, and accelerate diameter growth on remaining stems. Staff favored red spruce for release, shifting the species mix away from balsam fir - a short-lived, disease susceptible species projected to do poorly under most climate change scenarios. Thanks to the staff from North Country Fire for their help with this important project.

Photo Credit: USFWS

For more information contact: Steve_Agius@fws.gov

Nulhegan Basin Black Branch Bridge Repair



The black branch bridge at the Nulhegan Basin is being repaired during the month of August. A local contractor is lifting the bridge off its abutments and replacing the bridge's bearing pads and anchor bolts. The bridge serves as the primary access corridor onto the refuge and is the longest bridge within the Conte Refuge.

Photo Credit: USFWS

For more information contact: Steve_Agius@fws.gov

MAT Team Strikes Again: Salmon River Division



This month a team of Service employees, collectively known as the Maintenance Action Team (MAT) demolished an old house that was acquired with the purchase of the Salmon River Division in Connecticut. The MAT team is comprised of Service staff from different stations in the region, who come together to work on larger maintenance projects. This collective strategy saves the Service money and creates an atmosphere of comradery and teamwork for Service staff.

Photo Credit: USFWS

For more information contact: Andrew_French@fws.gov



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Storm Clean Up At Fannie Stebbins



Photo Credit: USFWS

An August wind and rain storm brought several trees down, blocking trails and boardwalks at our Fannie Stebbins Division in Longmeadow, MA. Refuge staff spent time cleaning up from the storm by removing large trees and debris that impeded public access to the trails.

For more information contact: Andrew_French@fws.gov

Bringing Light Into The Refuge



Photo Credit: USFWS

The maintenance building at the Fort River Division now has more natural light thanks to the new windows installed by refuge staff this month. Work was completed on this project just prior to the new siding being installed on the same building. The added light is a welcome change for staff that spend time working in the building.

For more information contact: Andrew_French@fws.gov

Fire Detail for Conte Maintenance Staff



Photo Credit: USFWS

Conte's maintenance worker, Chad Roderick, left for a fire detail in the State of California this month. In addition to fighting wildfires, his team responds to all hazards, and responded to a car accident where someone had accidentally driven off a cliff. Roderick's role was to cut an extraction route for the Ventura County Fire Department to get the patient out. Thank you Chad for your work on the front lines helping to keep people safe.

For more information contact: Chad_Roderick@fws.gov



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Puritan Tiger Beetle Work In Connecticut



Principal Investigator Rodger Gwiazdowski conducted a survey this month of where Puritan tiger beetles are depositing eggs along the banks of the Connecticut River. This work is part of the 2017 Cooperative Recovery Initiative designed to establish another self-sustaining population of tiger beetles along the Connecticut River, and reduce the risk of extinction of this federally endangered species.

For more information contact: Dean_Rhine@fws.gov

Photo Credit: USFWS

The Magic Of Dam Removal



Conte refuge worked with the Magic Mt Ski Area to remove an old defunct dam located on their property on Thompson Brook in Londonderry, Vermont. Additional partners on the project included the Service's Partners program and Division of Fish and Aquatic Conservation. Removing the dam will improve water quality and open up habitat for fish passage and other aquatic wildlife. Read more about this habitat improvement project as reported in the Bennington Banner: <https://bit.ly/34ZrAXw>

For more information contact: David_Sagan@fws.gov

Photo Credit: USFWS

Time Capsule Discovery



During the demolition of the Fetske property at the Salmon River Division, we discovered a time capsule of sorts, containing 34 guns and over 800 pounds of ammunition. Some of the guns are believed to be from the World War II and were manufactured in Germany. It is our hope that we can return this personal property to the heirs of the estate.

For more information contact: Andrew_French@fws.gov

Photo Credit: USFWS