



MISSISQUOI MATTERS

NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF
MISSISQUOI NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Spring, 2020



Spring Activities Schedule at Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge

*29 Tabor Rd.
Swanton, VT 05488*

All programs and tours are free, but registration is required where noted.

Owl Prowl

Friday, March 6th, 6:00 to 9:00 pm

Participants for the Owl Prowl will meet at the the refuge visitor's center on Tabor Road. We will then head out into the refuge to search, watch, and listen for some of our resident birds who operate during the night shift! Dress for the weather and bring a low power flashlight.

PLEASE CALL to register for this activity - 802-868-4781

Woodcock Walk

Friday, April 17th, 6:30 to 8:30 pm

Join refuge volunteer Greg Simard on a woodcock walk. The walk will be at the Stephen Young Marsh area and participants will meet at the Tabor Rd. parking lot located about one mile past the refuge visitor's center on Tabor Road. The area is identified by a sign labeled "Refuge Trails Parking". American Woodcock have a unique courtship display that incorporates an aerial figure-eight display and ground level calling. The courtship display occurs near sunset and into the early evening hours.

PLEASE CALL to register for this activity - 802-868-4781

Green Up Day at the Refuge

Friday, May 1st, 9:00 am to noon

Celebrate the 50th anniversary of Vermont's "Green Up Day" by helping clean up the Missisquoi river, and its banks, as it flows through the refuge. All participants should meet at the Louie's Landing parking lot on Rte. 78. The refuge will concentrate its efforts on river cleanup activities using refuge boats.

PLEASE CALL to register for this activity - 802-868-4781

2020 "Art at the Refuge" Opening & Reception

Friday, May 15th, 5:30 to 6:30 pm

The opening of the Friends of Missisquoi annual art show and the artist's reception will kick-off our celebration of World Migratory Bird Day. Come visit with local artists and discuss their wildlife related art. Light refreshments will be served. Artwork will be displayed through July 17th. Works will be focused on birds and nature found on the refuge. Media may include oil, acrylics, watercolor, pen and ink, pastels, photographs, and fabric-related works. Most works will be for sale. Artwork can be viewed and purchased on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday from Memorial Day through July 17th, or at special events when a volunteer or Friends member is staffing the Visitor Center.



Spring Activities Schedule continued

World Migratory Bird Day, Friday Talk by Maeve Kim Friday, May 15th, 6:30 pm

As a prelude to World Migratory Bird Day (see next event), birder and educator Maeve Kim will present *“Missisquoi’s Warblers: Nature’s Jewels Here Today, South America Tomorrow”*. Neon green, mid-night blue, charcoal gray, flame orange, deepest red, canary yellow, snow white, lime, baby blue – Vermont’s warblers are all neotropical migrants that spend most of their lives far from here, but they return every spring to dazzle our eyes! The presentation will be held immediately following the artist’s reception at the refuge Visitor’s Center.

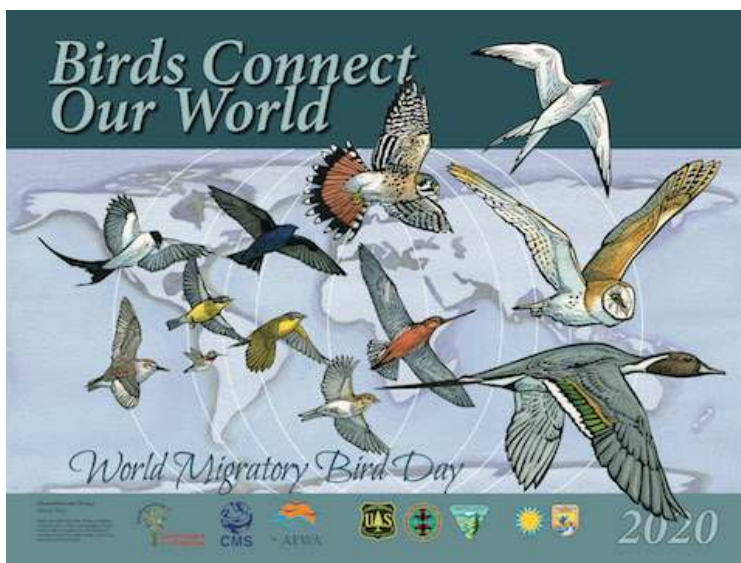
World Migratory Bird Day Saturday, May 16th, 5:30 am to approx. 2:00 pm

The Refuge will celebrate World Migratory Bird Day on Saturday, May 16th. The WMBD theme this year is **“Birds Connect Our World.”** We will start the day with an “Early Bird” walk at 5:30 am at the Maquam-Black Creek Trail. Meet at the parking area on Rte. 78, about 2½ miles west of Swanton village.

The main activities of the day will begin at 7:30 am with an orientation at the refuge Visitor Center. Participants will split up into several boat trips and bird walks, during which we will record all bird species and count as many individuals within those species as we can identify. All birding participants will return to the Visitor Center by 11:30 am to tally results over a pizza lunch provided by the Friends.

At approximately 1:00 pm, Margaret Fowle will present a talk on Bald Eagles in Vermont. Margaret is conservation biologist with Audubon Vermont’s Peregrine Falcon Recovery Program. Prior to coming to Audubon in 2009, Margaret coordinated Peregrine and Bald Eagle recovery efforts in Vermont.

Throughout the day, Art at the Refuge, an exhibit of artworks from local artists, will be on display at the Visitor Center.

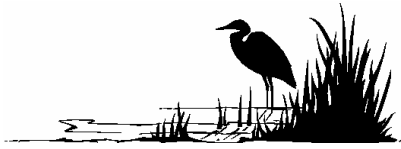


PLEASE CALL to register for this activity - 802-868-4781

Other Winter events will be posted on the Friends website as soon as dates are known.

To check for any schedule changes or additions, visit the Friends website at www.friendsofmissisquoi.org and click on “Calendar”.

For more information about the refuge, visit www.fws.gov/refuge/missisquoi/



Missisquoi Matters

is the quarterly newsletter of the Friends of Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge, Inc., a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization, dedicated to promoting a better awareness, appreciation, conservation, and responsible utilization of the

Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge.

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(802) 868-4781 ext 121

www.friendsofmissisquoi.org

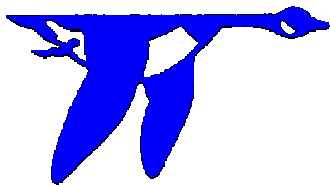
E-mail: info@friendsofmissisquoi.org

Newsletter edited by Al Crist

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Lisa Swainbank	<i>Office Administrative Assistant</i>
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MNWR Visitor Center hours
are Monday thru Friday
8:00am – 3:30pm

and even more Spring Activities Schedule !

Monthly Bird Monitoring Walks

3rd Saturday of each month, 8:00 to 10:00 am

Friends of MNWR members Ken Copenhaver and Julie Filiberti lead bird monitoring walks year-round on various refuge trails on the third Saturday of each month. The purpose of the walks is to gather long-term data on the presence of birds, their abundance, and changes in populations. Observations are entered into the Vermont eBird database where data is stored by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society. These walks are appropriate for birders of all skill levels and provide a wonderful opportunity to learn about birds throughout the seasons. After 119 months of walks we have recorded 158 species of birds. Registration for the walks is not required. The schedule for the next three months is:

March 21: Jeep Trail. Meet at the Louie's Landing parking lot located on Rte 78, approx 3½ miles west of Swanton village. From there we will drive to the trail head at Mac's Landing.

April 18: Stephen Young Marsh Trail. Meet at the parking lot on Tabor Rd, about a mile past the refuge Visitor Center and across the road from the marsh.

May 16: Stephen Young Marsh Trail and Railroad Trail. See World Migratory Bird Day info. on page 2.

Eagle Point WMA Bird Walk

Saturday, June 6th, 8:00 to 10:00 am

The Friends, in partnership with the Memphremagog Watershed Association, will be holding our annual Bird Walk at the Eagle Point Wildlife Management Area.

Located along the Canadian border just north of Newport City, Eagle Point WMA is owned by the US Fish and Wildlife Service and is also officially part of the Missisquoi NWR. It is managed by the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department in partnership with the refuge. Eagle Point is a 420 acre parcel consisting of nearly a mile of lake-shore habitat, numerous wetlands, large meadows, hemlock, and mixed forest. It supports a great diversity of wildlife including aquatic mammals, waterfowl, grassland birds, and many other wetland and terrestrial species.

Please email Julie Filiberti at vtfiliberti@gmail.com if you plan to attend the walk or need more information. Hope to see you there!

Optionally, for anyone who wants to make a day of it, some of us are planning to bird a few more Northeast Kingdom spots after the walk, possibly Moose Bog or Silvio Conte NWR. All are welcome to join us!

Refuge Managers Update - February, 2020



Anyone visiting the refuge office in the last month may have noticed a new face. Tyler Barriere, a Federal Law Enforcement Officer, moved into Missisquoi's office in mid December. Tyler is a regional

employee tasked with performing law enforcement actions on the hundreds of conservation easements throughout the Northeast Region of the refuge system. Missisquoi was chosen to house Tyler as we had available office space and have been without consistent law enforcement presence for some time. While Tyler is a regional employee, we do expect to see him working Missisquoi as opportunities permit. Tyler has quite a bit of experience with easement management and enforcement. Previously stationed in the Midwest, he was responsible for an extensive array of lands under conservation easements. The next time you stop in the office or see a new face out on the refuge please take time to welcome Tyler to Missisquoi!

Conservation easements can be an effective way to protect important habitats for wildlife across the United States. Essentially, a conservation easement directs how a landowner can use their land. Easements come in many flavors and can be narrowly focused (for example an easement to keep farmland in agriculture) or more restrictive (to protect wetland values and function). Conservation easements are granted by government organizations (Natural Resources Conservation Service,

by Ken Sturm, Refuge Manager, Missisquoi NWR

US Fish & Wildlife Service) and by private non-profit groups such as the Vermont Land Trust or the Lake Champlain Land Trust. Missisquoi NWR has easements in Vermont and New York totaling 378 acres.

Easements are typically perpetual agreements that follow the land regardless of how many times it changes hands. The landowner is compensated for the rights they relinquish (for example, building structures, altering hydrology, prohibiting cutting of trees) and often times there is a tax incentive if the easement diminishes the overall value of the property. For some, tax relief and a payment for compensation is enough to decide to move forward with an easement. However, many others approach the decision through the lens of landscape conservation. Truly if we are to "move the needle" on declining species in this country, protected lands like the Missisquoi NWR are only part of the puzzle. It takes a complex network of conserved lands to ensure that our resident and migratory wildlife populations can continue to survive in our every changing environment.

If, after reading this, you are interested in learning more about conservation easements feel free to give the refuge a call or stop by. There are plenty of other excellent sources of information for guiding individual landowners through the various options including the Vermont Land Trust, NRCS, The Nature Conservancy and of course the USFWS. A useful website to start with is from the Vermont Natural Resources Council: <https://vnrc.org/community-planning-toolbox/tools/conservation-easement/>. We cannot do this alone; we need to be "all in" for conservation to be successful.

Friends Board Long-range Planning

The board of directors of Friends of Missisquoi NWR held extended planning sessions in early January, as well as last June, to discuss long-range planning, priorities, and opportunities for our mission of supporting the refuge. Ken Sturm, refuge manager, also participated in both sessions. In June we tried to generally analyze our strengths and weaknesses as a group as well as what opportunities we might have going forward in building our organization and increasing our effectiveness in supporting the refuge.

Then in January we developed specific proposals and also made decisions on funding several refuge projects. It was decided that we need to bring several more people onto the board and have those people fill several specific positions. Ken Sturm pointed out that he is concerned that current board members are taking on too much and

might be in danger of "burning out". The two volunteer positions we would like to fill are "membership and outreach chair" and "refuge volunteer coordinator". In the coming months we'll be reaching out in various ways to fill these positions. If anyone is interested or would like more information please email:

volunteer@friendsofmissisquoi.org

Ken Sturm also presented possible Friends funding opportunities for the refuge. We decided on three projects to fund. Friends will purchase a \$2,000 GPS transmitter harness for use in a woodcock migration study. For more information on this fascinating project go to: www.woodcockmigration.org The refuge also plans to purchase a harness as well. Friends also budgeted \$2,000 for invasive species control (honeysuckle & buckthorn) and will also spend \$1,000 for fertilizer and lime application on grassland bird fields at the refuge.

The New D  j   Vu

by Judy Sefchick, Wildlife Biologist, Missisquoi NWR

There is nothing ‘new’ about the New Year on this mid-January morning. A sense of d  j   vu, once uncommon, seems oddly familiar to me now. Is this a recurring nightmare? Are the synapses of my brain misfiring, or is the Missisquoi NWR in a time-loop, causing me to relive the same day over and over (e.g. the infamous movie *Groundhog Day*)? Who knows—at this point, anything seems possible!

I remember having a similar feeling just 3 months ago, when Halloween evening turned into an honest-to-goodness fright night for those near the Missisquoi River. With a daytime temperature of 60 degrees, and a nighttime storm delivering 5 inches of rain, the mighty Missisquoi, quite literally, went off the deep end!

The aftermath of a manic Missisquoi was revealed the following morning. As I unsuspectingly set out on November 1st, it didn’t take long for me to realize that something was very wrong on my Enosburg to Swanton commute. High water meant two different detours on the first seven miles leading out from Enosburg Village, and then my journey ended. With the river rising and Route 105 drowning, there was nowhere left to go! Who could have guessed that by evening, the Missisquoi River in Swanton would crest more than seven feet higher than it was the day before?



Satellite photo of Missisquoi River at the refuge during Halloween flood event. Note massive amounts of sediment (brown color), unfortunately rich in phosphorous and other nutrients, carried from upstream sources .

Let’s face it, the Missisquoi is a *river of contradictions*. It always has been, though maybe not to this extent. Changing climate and weather patterns haven’t helped its bad behavior. In recent years the river that I love has turned into a Jekyll and Hyde of sorts, with predictably unpredictable frenetic tendencies. As one of the river’s biggest fans, I can’t say that the new instability will lessen my affection for it, though sometimes I do long for the good old days. I, for one, liked the predictable high water in spring, low water in fall, and the fact that more months of the year than not were deemed ‘safe’ from catastrophe!

The paradox of the Missisquoi doesn’t end there. To a casual observer, a paddle on the Missisquoi River may liken itself to a carefree ride on the ‘Tunnel of Love.’ After all, what’s more idyllic than spending a summer day in a boat on a shallow, slow-moving river while watching wildlife roam? For those with a more complex river connection, like me, the Missisquoi is a roller coaster with extreme ups and downs, twists and turns that you don’t see coming, quiet interludes, and downright scary situations that will make your stomach drop!

With the ebb and flow of a changing world and a changing river, it’s no wonder that this new d  j   vu surrounds me. Besides thinking about refuge wildlife, I now ponder how many times we’ll shovel silt from the Mac’s Bend Building. What habitats will receive new invasive plants from floodwaters, or, my personal favorite: when will floodwaters next take out the Mac’s Bend Road? Scientists say that d  j   vu is a good thing; it’s the brain’s way of checking that its memories are correct. Apparently, my brain has experienced so many refuge flood events, that it can no longer sort truth from fiction!

November 4th was my first day back to work, after roads were repaired from the Halloween massacre. I remember being acutely aware of what was in front of me. Daylight saving time had ended the day before, so that morning, I saw the light in more ways than one! “What a difference a day makes” I thought, while wondering if Maria Grever, who coined the phrase, ever faced a similar dichotomy. That’s life along the multifaceted Missisquoi River, and there’s no place that I’d rather be.

Volunteer Spotlight

The refuge has over 75 volunteers that perform invaluable services to the refuge. Last year the refuge benefitted from over 1,000 hours of volunteer support – support for habitat management, maintenance, and visitor services.

This issue we're shining the spotlight on Chris Smith. Chris is the State Coordinator for the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Missisquoi Matters: How did you discover the refuge?

Chris Smith: I grew up in St. Albans. As a child and young adult I loved the outdoors and spent countless hours fishing, hiking, hunting, and exploring in the upper Missisquoi Watershed – I didn't know the Refuge existed. I attended the University of Vermont as a student in the School of Natural Resources to pursue my love of the natural world. During the spring semester of my sophomore year my advisor asked if I was interested in a summer biological technician position at Missisquoi NWR. He knew I was from St. Albans and thought it might be a good fit. I applied for the job and worked at the refuge for the next 3 summers – I was hooked. As a bio-tech I worked on the entire refuge. The wetland habitats and species they support were all new; there was something different to see every day. From the first time I saw Cranberry Pool, Big Marsh Slough, Long Marsh, and Martindale Point I knew the refuge was a very special place.



MM: Why do you volunteer your time to the refuge?

CS: There are three primary reasons I volunteer at the Refuge. Volunteering gives me another opportunity to connect with the landscape of the Missisquoi delta and all of the plants, animals, and fish it supports. During a volunteer opportunity you may get to see a different part of the Refuge, at a different time of day, or a different time of year than you would through other recreational activities. Secondly, I feel it is very important to give back. Whether it be a charity, community event, or in the case of the refuge's support of the natural resource, giving our time to those things most important to us can make a lasting difference. Lastly, and maybe most importantly, I volunteer because of the people: the people you get to meet, the people you get to help (Ken and the rest of the refuge staff), and the people you volunteer with. The interactions and relationships with the people involved are very special.

MM: What tasks do you do?

CS: Over the years I have volunteered at the Kids Fishing Derby, with nature walks for school groups, with the banding program, and with the junior waterfowl program. Over the last few years, I have helped to ready blind sites in the junior hunt areas, and with banding waterfowl.

MM: How long have you been volunteering?

CS: I first volunteered at the refuge in 1991. I helped a graduate student collect vegetation data for a waterfowl mortality study.

MM: How do you spend your time on the refuge when you aren't volunteering?

CS: I spend a fair amount of time each fall waterfowl hunting on the refuge. My sons have been very fortunate to participate in the junior waterfowl program for the past 5 years. The experience has opened a new level to my enjoyment of the refuge. Getting to watch my sons take in a sunrise over the marsh for the first time or wait in anticipation for the first flight of teal on opening day has allowed me to appreciate the place and the resources with a completely new perspective. In a sense, this is the beauty and the power of the Missisquoi delta; it is ever changing and provides the opportunity for something new on each visit.

MM: What is your favorite place on the refuge?

CS: Ten years ago, I would have said the Cranberry Pool, Goose Bay Pool, Big Marsh Slough Complex. There are very few freshwater wetland habitats in New England like this area. However, the

Volunteer Spotlight >> p. 7

Supporting the Refuge is as Easy as Pie

In November, we were surprised and humbled to learn that the Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge had been selected as the recipient of the local fund-raising effort 'Pies for Bonnie.' Originally started by Bonnie Fournier, the effort has been continued in her memory after she passed away in 2018, and is organized by Shelly Robtoy, Bonnie's daughter, and Mary Wood.



Each November, the volunteer group bakes pies which are sold to the community. The proceeds are donated to a local non-profit organization. Past recipients have included the new Swanton playground and suicide prevention programs. In tribute to Bonnie's concern for environmental issues, the Missisquoi NWR and Friends of Missisquoi were selected as their 2019 beneficiary.

Over 15 volunteers baked more than 80 pies, and the group was able to donate more than \$1,100 to the Friends of Missisquoi. The funds will help us continue our efforts toward providing transportation aid to school field trips to the refuge, and also our help with invasive species control on the refuge. THANK YOU!

Yellow Iris: The Search and Destroy Mission Continues

Last field season, Missisquoi NWR staff, volunteers, contractors, and interns waged an all-out war on the invasive Yellow Iris. The battle took place in the refuge's floodplain forest, along the Missisquoi River and Dead Creek. Countless casualties occurred as we mapped habitat, marked plants, and sprayed 56 infested acres. Who won the war? Stay tuned as Refuge staff and volunteers re-survey 25 acres this spring, to determine if the iris re-treated, or sent in reinforcements!



FRIENDS OF MISSISQUOI NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

BI-MONTHLY BOARD MEETING

Wednesday, March 11, 2020 at 6:30 pm at the Refuge Visitor Center

Members are always welcome & encouraged to attend. Next board meeting is May 13th at 6:30 pm

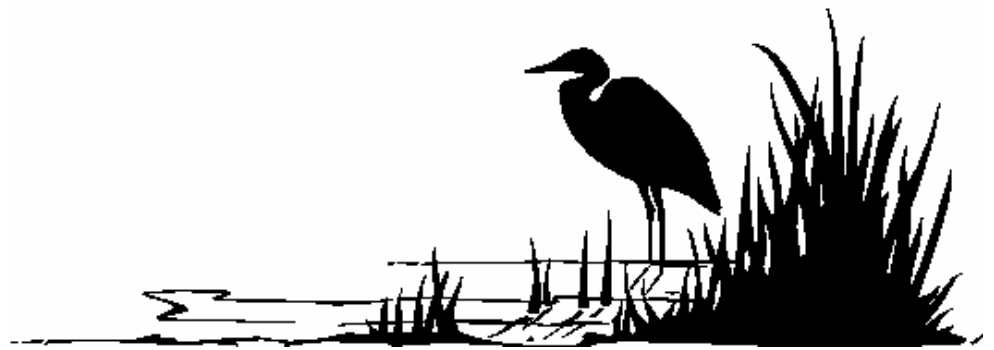
<< *p. 6 Volunteer Spotlight* more time I spend in Long Marsh Bay and Channel the more I come to appreciate this special place on the Refuge. In late October when the silver maples and red maples are on full display, and the wild rice has turned a tawny brown with Missisquoi Bay in the background, Long Marsh is as visually stunning as anywhere on the Refuge.

MM: What do you feel is the most important aspect of the refuge?

CS: It is truly special that this unique landscape in the northeast is preserved in perpetuity. Even with the threats from invasive species and degraded water quality, the Missisquoi delta remains much the same as it has for thousands of years. Many parts of our natural landscape have been changed forever and there will always be the argument about whether the changes were for better or worse. It is reassuring to know that the habitats and species of the Missisquoi delta will be protected for the foreseeable future.

If Chris's story has inspired you and you would like to volunteer at the refuge, contact Ken Sturm, Refuge Manager. Ken can be reached at 802-868-4781 or by email to Ken_Sturm@fws.gov

**Friends of Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge, Inc.
29 Tabor Road
Swanton, VT 05488**



Please tell us how to serve you better - The Friends of Missisquoi NWR Board is eager to know more about the kind of programs, outings, or activities you would like to have offered on or about the refuge. Please email your suggestions and comments to *info@friendsofmissisquoi.org*. Thanks!

Yes! I want to support the Friends of Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge and its programs with my membership. My dues include a subscription to Missisquoi Matters and a 10% discount on items at the Friends Gift Shop. Enclosed is my contribution of:

Membership Level

- \$10 Student
- \$15 Individual
- \$20 Family / Classroom
- \$50 Supporting
- \$100 Steward
- \$250 Life / Business
- \$1000 Patron

Would you like to receive your newsletter by postal mail or by email? Please circle one:

Postal Mail Email

Date: _____ (membership begins the month you join)

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

(Your email address will not be shared with any other organization. We would like to be able to contact members regarding last minute changes to Friends activities and events.)