



MISSISQUOI MATTERS

NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF
MISSISQUOI NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Summer, 2023



Summer Activities Schedule at Missisquoi NWR 29 Tabor Road, Swanton, VT 05488

Eagle Point WMA Bird Walk

Saturday, June 3rd, 8 am

The Friends of Missisquoi and the Memphremagog Watershed Association are hosting a bird walk at Eagle Point Wildlife Management Area (WMA) in Derby, VT on Saturday, June 3rd. We'll meet at the loop road parking area at 8:00 am. We typically spend two to three hours on the walk.

Eagle Point WMA at Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge is a 420 acre parcel located along the eastern shore of Lake Memphremagog on the United States-Canada border. The WMA is located approximately 5 miles north of Newport City on Eagle Point Road. It is owned by the US Fish and Wildlife Service and managed by the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department in partnership.



Note: There are no facilities on the property.

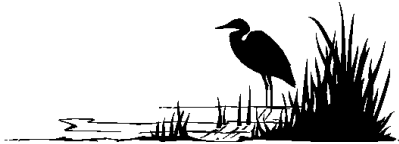
Please register for the walk at the Memphremagog Watershed Association website:

<https://memphremagogwatershedassociation.com/bird-walk-2023/>

Directions to Eagle Point:

- From East Main Street/VT 105/5 in Newport, turn north on Sias Avenue (Cumberland Farms is on the northeast corner of this intersection) – .6 miles
- Sias Avenue turns into Darling Hill Road – 1.6mi
- At V-intersection, take the left fork which is North Derby Road – 2.1 miles
- At T-intersection, turn left onto Eagle Point Road (T-17 on Google maps) – 1.3 miles
- Cross the bridge and go past the parking area for the wetland viewing trail.
- Take the first right and park along the edge of the loop road.

This is where we will meet up! See you there.



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.

29 Tabor Road, Swanton, VT 05488

(802) 868-4781 ext 121

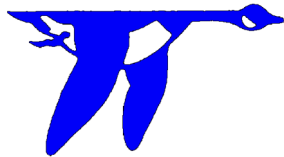
www.friendsofmissisquoi.org

E-mail: info@friendsofmissisquoi.org

Newsletter edited by Al Crist

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Judy Sefchick	<i>Wildlife Biologist</i>
Lisa Swainbank	
	<i>Office Administrative Assistant</i>
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	<i>Maintenance Mechanic</i>

Monthly Bird Monitoring Walks

Friends board members and birders extraordinaire Ken Copenhaver and Julie Filiberti lead the walks 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. These walks are appropriate for birders of all skill levels and provide a wonderful opportunity to learn about birds throughout the seasons. After 158 months of walks, we have recorded 162 species of birds. Registration for the walks is not required.

The schedule for the next three months is:

June 17: Railroad Trail. Meet at the parking lot on Tabor Rd, about a mile past the refuge Visitor Center and across the road from the marsh.

July 15: Maquam/Black Creek Trail. Meet at the parking lot located on Rte. 78, approx. 2½ miles west of Swanton village.

August 19: 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.

“Art on the Refuge” continues until July 21st

The annual art show is once again back in the Refuge Visitor Center this year. The exhibit kicked off on May 20th during the World Migratory Bird Day week-end.

Talented artists from the area are exhibiting their work with a focus on refuge habitats and the birds that live in or migrate through the area. Art will be on display until July 21st and can be viewed any time the Visitor Center is open. Please call 802-868-4781 to confirm accessibility. The artwork is available for purchase.

If and when new Refuge events are scheduled, they 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 www.friendsofmissisquoi.org and click on “Calendar”. For more information about the refuge, visit www.fws.gov/refuge/missisquoi/

Another Fun WMBD!

Thank you to everyone that joined us for our 3rd annual World Migratory Bird Day “Weekend Challenge”! Throughout the weekend, anyone birding on the refuge was asked to share their eBird checklists with our Migratory Bird Day account. (eBird: MNWRBirdDay). You can see the results here: <https://ebird.org/profile/MTA5NzMzMw/US-VT-011>

We began our extended weekend on Thursday evening with the online Zoom presentation “On the Move With Bobolinks” by University of New England professor and UVM graduate, Noah Perlut. Noah began his Bobolink research at Shelburne Farms in 2002 and it continues to this day. He has been instrumental in determining how hayfield and pasture management affects the breeding success of grassland birds. This was followed by a Friday presentation by Kevin Tolan, biologist with the Vermont Center for Ecostudies, about historic population trends of grassland birds in Vermont, with an emphasis on the Eastern Meadowlark. If you missed either of these talks, you can see them on our YouTube channel at: <https://www.youtube.com/@friendsofmissisquoi1650>

We had a week-end of productive birding on the refuge, with 13 checklists reported to eBird, totaling 88 species. Beginning with a Saturday morning nocturnal hike, a few intrepid observers enjoyed the sunrise and dawn chorus on the Maquam / Black Creek trail. In fact, their first checklist was submitted to eBird at 4:02 am! Later in the morning we hosted our monthly bird monitoring walk at the Stephen Young Marsh.



Saturday morning bird monitoring at the marsh

One of the highlights of the weekend was the group paddle on the Missisquoi River led by board member Jason Crooks. Jason reported, “We had a great day on Sunday! We had eight people: two canoes of two people each and four solo kayaks. We headed down river to Shad Island and took the western fork and headed out toward the lake, then turned around and paddled back. Picked up some trash along the way. We got caught in a 5 minute downpour, which added to the adventure! We had saw 40 different species of birds, as well as several muskrat, a mink, three spiny softshell turtles, and lots and lots of map turtles.”

Thanks again to all who came out this year and shared their sightings with us! We’re already looking forward to May 18th & 19th, 2024!

FRIENDS OF MISSISQUOI NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

BI-MONTHLY BOARD MEETING

Wednesday, July 12th, 2023 at 6:30 pm by Zoom

email info@friendsofmissisquoi.org if you’d like to attend via Zoom

Members are always welcome & encouraged to attend.

Next board meeting is September 13th at 6:30 pm

WMBD Photos



Sunday's Group Paddle on the River



Got Bobolinks? Yes, 7!



Brown Thrasher by Rich Kelley

Volunteer Spotlight

When Carol Crosby approached Refuge Manager Ken Sturm to inquire about volunteer opportunities at MNWR they discussed several options. As they talked Carol noticed the colored feathers hanging in the windows as bird deterrents. Ken mentioned that they were not as successful as he had hoped. A fiber artist and art educator, Carol offered to design and create some organic hanging pieces to donate to the Refuge. Within weeks these

beautiful creations were applied to the exteriors of the windows. Each circle depicts different birds - Blue Jay, Tree Swallow, Cardinal, Osprey, Red Wing Blackbird, Crow and Heron. These amazing works of art are not only helping our feathered friends to avoid crashes but are a welcome addition of lovely artwork for our two legged visitors to enjoy. Thank you, Carol!



Have you missed one of the great Zoom presentations sponsored by the Friends of Missisquoi? Would you like to re-watch “Bird Tales”, or the recent WMBD presentations about Bobolinks and Meadowlarks, or our recent three-part series about invasive species in Vermont?

Well, you’re in luck! Check out our Friends of Missisquoi YouTube Channel at:

<https://www.youtube.com/@friendsofmissisquoi1650>



Refuge Managers Update - May, 2023



“Moving Forward”

For the refuge, the year 2022 was a hard year. We lost our long time Maintenance Mechanic Joe

Bertrand to retirement and were short-staffed for over a year. When you have a staff of four employees, and you lose one for that length of time, things get challenging. Believe me, we all felt it.

However things change, as always, and we find ourselves moving forward in 2023. A refreshing change I must say. Yes, we have moved forward by filling our full time maintenance position with Chris Whitaker, whom we introduced in the spring newsletter. Chris is learning the ropes and has become fully integrated with our staff as he continues to learn the refuge and the varying responsibilities of his job.

We have also had the opportunity to hire a temporary Biological Sciences Technician to help us with our busy field season of biological and maintenance work. Sabrena Camp started in April and comes with varied experience, most recently working for the U.S. Geological Survey in California. She has also spent time in Hawaii with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Sabrena’s varied experiences and talents are a welcome addition to our small staff and you can be sure she will have the opportunity to build on these experiences at Missisquoi.

We are also moving forward with the continued help of volunteers. We have our full group of Visitor’s Center front desk volunteers

by Ken Sturm, Refuge Manager, Missisquoi NWR

back, plus several new individuals interested in providing back up assistance during the summer months. This is great news, as it ensures the refuge Visitor’s Center will be open Monday thru Friday reliably during the busy summer and early fall seasons. Other regular volunteers continue to provide invaluable assistance in biological monitoring of invasive plants and general support in refuge operations such as lawn and trail maintenance. As always, we thank our volunteers that help to support the Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge – we couldn’t do it without you!

The season is moving forward as well, and with it some normal, as well as new, biological projects. Of course our biologist, Judy Sefchick, will be out monitoring migratory birds as they nest in the grasslands and wetlands of the refuge. But this year we have special funding to continue inventorying native bumblebees, as well as butterflies, to evaluate shrubland management for these invertebrates on the refuge. The intention is to evaluate different management treatments of shrubland habitat that will maximize pollinator habitat as well as habitat for migratory birds.

By the time this article comes out we will have celebrated World Migratory Bird Day, our annual celebration of migratory birds at the refuge. However if you missed the count week-end, you can still view the wildlife art show at the Visitor’s Center, which is once again hosting a stunning array of photography, paintings, and other media depicting local wildlife, all from local artists. As the spring moves forward into summer, don’t let the nice weather pass you by without visits to the trails and the art show at Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge!

Birding Q & A

by Ken Copenhaver

Here is a birding question that often comes up in the Spring:

Q. What should I do if I find a baby bird out of its nest?

A. The first thing is to determine the approximate age of the baby bird, specifically, whether it's a nestling or a fledgling. Sometimes very young birds can fall out of the nest. Other times, you may find a chick that's ready or nearly ready to fledge that's on the ground and looking like it might be in distress. So let's deal with the fledgling first.

A bird that has long wing and tail feathers and looks nearly adult-sized (though generally scruffier than an adult) is a fledgling that either was making its first attempt to venture out into the world, or was frightened from its nest somewhat prematurely. The bird may flutter along the ground, but not be able to get airborne. One or both parents could be nearby and could be very upset, both with the chick being out of the nest and especially with the chick being approached by a human. In this case, it's best to leave the chick alone. At most, move it to a protected area, such as under bushes where it's not out in the open for a predator to find easily. Even if you know where the nest is, returning a bird of this age to the nest will be futile, as it will most likely be upset enough that it will immediately leave the nest again anyway. The parents should be nearby and will protect and feed it. It's normal for fledglings of many species to spend one or more weeks on the ground before they're able to do any serious flying. Watch the bird only from a distance, as being too close could prevent the parents from tending to it. However, if the bird appears to be injured, contact a local certified Wildlife Rehabilitator or Wildlife Veterinarian. The best source is an internet search for your local area.

If the chick is newly hatched or has just pin feathers or fluff and doesn't have long wing and tail feathers yet, it's a nestling that isn't ready to survive out of the nest. If you know where the nest is and if it's accessible, you can return it to the nest. If that's

not possible, it's best to contact a wildlife rehabilitator. In fact, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act prohibits handling or possessing most wild birds without a federal permit. Follow the instructions of the rehabilitator, which will likely be to keep it warm and safe. Do not try to feed it or give it water unless instructed to do so.

If you do need to handle any bird, alive or dead, be aware that diseases can be passed both from wildlife to humans and from humans to wildlife. Wear gloves and wash your hands with soap and water afterward.

And now a personal story: Some years ago, Robins built a nest in my tractor shed on a ledge right above the tractor at about eye level. I discreetly checked on the nest periodically for my own curiosity to count the eggs, see when they hatched, and watch their development. But when they started getting feathers, I tried to avoid disturbing them until one day I needed to use the tractor. When I started the tractor, the almost-fledglings abandoned the nest and ended up in the middle of the yard. The parents were very upset. Their alarm calls attracted nearby birds of several other species, including Cardinals, Chickadees, etc—all equally excited and all with a seemingly equal interest in protecting these chicks. It was amazing to see this inter-species call to arms!

And another personal story: When I was a kid, I found a tiny, naked baby bird under a large Norway Maple tree in our yard. The nest would have been high in the tree and there was no way to return the chick to it. So my mother decided to take care of it. She kept it warm and fed it milk with an eyedropper. Her reasoning, apparently, was that babies need milk, never considering that it's *mammal* babies who need milk! But it grew, and as it got a bit older, she fed it bread cubes soaked in milk. She named it Chester. (I have no idea why.) After a few weeks, it started growing feathers and we could see that Chester was a Common Grackle. Then one day Chester bit my mom and out the door he went to fend for himself! So there's everything you need to know about how NOT to care for a baby bird!

Who's Out & About on the Refuge?

Meet Nicholas. Nicholas is 8 years young and is an extremely active Cub Scout. Although he's only been involved for two years, his Cub Scout belt is adorned with a plethora of badges. We caught up with Nicholas on the Old Railroad Passage at the Friend's Trail Maintenance Day. He was there with his mom, loppers in hand, working hard towards a new badge, the Messengers of Peace, a special ring that once earned will go around the Boy Scout fleur-de-lis on his shirt. Nicholas knows all of the refuge trails, as he and his family are local residents and frequent the refuge often to walk their dog. According to Nicholas, the Stephen Young Marsh Trail is probably his favorite because, being a herp guy, he loves to look for salamanders in the wet spots. He may love his snakes and salamanders, but Nicholas knows his birds too and rattled off a dozen or so that he has seen on the refuge. His favorite thing about Missisquoi is just being able to take a walk outside and find something new. We certainly

appreciated Nicholas's time and energy for a few hours of trail maintenance and wish him the best of luck on receiving his Messengers of Peace badge! If you see Nicholas out on the trails, definitely stop and say hello!



The New 'Vermont Butterfly Atlas'

From the common to the rare, the Vermont Center for Ecostudies needs your help in recording butterflies in Vermont. Everyone knows what a butterfly looks like and many of you are armed with a camera. Help us help the butterflies! Whether you help with full surveys or just find a few butterflies while doing other outdoor activities, it's easy to report your sightings to the Vermont Butterfly Atlas at e-Butterfly.

Joining the Vermont Butterfly Atlas is easy and you don't have to be an expert. Just follow the steps given here: <https://val.vtecostudies.org/projects/vermont-butterfly-atlas/join-butterfly-atlas/>



Get started by joining the Vermont Butterfly Atlas, and add to your observations while walking the trails or paddling the waterways of the Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge. The information gained will benefit these colorful pollinators, and add to our understanding of their presence at the refuge and throughout the state.



Land Acknowledgement Signs

In May of 2022 the Friends were awarded the O'Brien Prize from the National Wildlife Refuge Association for their plan to recognize and make connections with the local Abenaki community. To be considered for the prize, the proposed project had to heighten the public awareness of the Friends, and also had to bring enduring value to the Friends and bring benefit to the refuge. Work on writing a land acknowledgement had already begun when the prize was applied for, but winning the award gave the needed funding to create signs of the acknowledgement and to post the signs on the refuge for the public

to read when they visit. Recently, the signs were purchased and erected on the refuge. They are located in the kiosks at Maquam/Black Creek Trail, Louie's Landing, and the Old Railroad Passage/Steven Young Marsh parking area as well as on the Discovery Trail just before the boardwalk. Brochures with information about the Abenaki Nation of Missisquoi will be posted alongside the land acknowledgement signs soon. Connections have been made between the Friends and the local Abenaki community, and going forward, these connections will continue to bring benefit to both organizations.



Friends board members after placement of the new signs. L to R: Julie Filiberti (originator of, and the brains behind the project), Tom Hargy, Rich Kelley, and Ken Copenhaver. Many thanks to Julie for the countless hours spent on this worthy project.

Staffing and Budgetary Crisis at Missisquoi NWR

By Julie Filiberti

The National Wildlife Refuge System was already suffering, somewhat imperceptibly, in 2011, when Ken Sturm accepted his coveted position as Refuge Manager of the Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge (Missisquoi NWR). Ken was excited to leave his post in West Virginia and return to bucolic Vermont to work at a small 6,500-acre refuge that was known for its widespread wetlands and waterfowl habitat management. The refuge was established in 1943, with the sole purpose of protecting and conserving the Missisquoi River delta area, an important migratory stopover location along the Atlantic flyway for many species of birds. After graduating from the University of Vermont, Ken's early career focused on water birds and waterfowl habitat, so taking a managerial position at the refuge seemed like a natural and exciting fit. Thrilled to start working in his new environment, Ken was naive to the looming budgetary stresses that would continually affect his ability to complete tasks that he knew were critical to managing a wildlife refuge.

Judy Sefchick was already slightly familiar with the budgetary constraints at Missisquoi when she met Ken, her new refuge manager. Hired in the fall of 2006, Judy had been experiencing the tightening belts since her first day on the job. Like Ken, Judy felt an inherent calling to Missisquoi NWR. She had previously received her bachelor's degree in Wildlife Biology and went on to obtain a Master of Science degree in Wetland Ecology and Waterfowl Management. Both degrees were well suited for the work that needed to be accomplished at a refuge providing critical habitat to migrating water birds. She was eager to work directly with the many rare and unique habitats contained on the refuge, including the floodplain forests, freshwater wetlands, woodland bogs, grasslands, and red maple/green ash swamps. She was also eager to play a part in the conservation of the many declining and at-risk species that utilized those habitats within the refuge.

Neither Judy nor Ken could have anticipated that

in the year 2023 the two of them would comprise half of the refuge staff. They also could not have anticipated that they would be unable to effectively complete their duties due to overwhelming budgetary constraints.

The Missisquoi NWR staff is not alone in their frustrations. The entire National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS), the world's largest network of lands and waters dedicated to wildlife conservation, is in peril due to drastic and repeated underfunding. As a whole, the NWRS is facing a staffing crisis that severely threatens its ability to effectively protect biodiversity and provide recreational opportunities, two functions that the NWRS was established to do. Since 2011, over 800 positions have been cut from a system that manages over 560 refuges, 95 million acres of land, and over 740 million acres of submerged lands and waters. Those 800 lost jobs, each of them essential for protecting threatened and endangered species, conserving habitats, and connecting communities with nature, represent an enormous 25% loss of capacity. Continuing down this path is unsustainable, as the NWRS continues to acquire new land while simultaneously maintaining an increase in public visitation. Looking towards the future, a healthy NWRS is essential in a time of declining biodiversity and climate crises.

According to the 2007 Comprehensive Conservation Plan for Missisquoi, a guide that provides long-term guidance for management decisions and establishing goals, objectives, and strategies needed to accomplish refuge purposes and future needs, a fully staffed and functioning Missisquoi NWR would be comprised of 11 personnel. Currently, the refuge only has funding to employ four. Because a staff comprised of four people cannot possibly perform the duties of 11, the short-term and long-term goals of the refuge are not being achieved, and the goals the team is forced to abandon have troubled both Judy and Ken.

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“Crisis”, from << p. 10

Missisquoi felt the worst blow in 2018, when Missisquoi NWR’s Park Ranger retired and was never replaced. The loss of that position had quite a detrimental impact on what the refuge can provide for services. The Park Ranger was the public face of the refuge and was solely responsible for all aspects of education and public outreach, as well as volunteer recruitment and management. Without a Park Ranger on staff, the remaining employees are forced to incorporate facets of the lost position, while still maintaining the roles that were originally assigned to them. Due to this, the refuge has not been able to keep up with the tasks deemed critical to the mission of the refuge. They no longer have the time to plan and provide events, such as the annual fishing derby. They no longer have the staffing to welcome and educate school groups or the public on wildlife and conservation. They no longer have the ability to supervise volunteer groups, such as the Youth Conservation Corp, to conduct necessary maintenance or assist with annual habitat management projects. Reinstating a Park Ranger position would be Ken’s first priority if the funding returns.

Ken and Judy both worry about their future ability to manage Missisquoi NWR’s habitats. Without adequate staffing, they are missing opportunities to proactively develop and conduct management and research on the ground, which would ensure the refuge is meeting its established purpose. They also worry about their ability to meet new and developing conservation needs for the future. Ken states, “Without staff to complete all the habitat management work, research, and monitoring, we are probably not fully protecting and conserving the wildlife that relies on the refuge. Nor are we able to fully plan for future adaptations and changes. It also increases the stress of staff, who are 110% committed and try not to let things slip too far.” Many of the biology and maintenance programs are severely backlogged and Judy, in her role as biologist, worries about wildlife declining as a result of the habitats becoming unproductive and the impacts of climate change not being addressed.

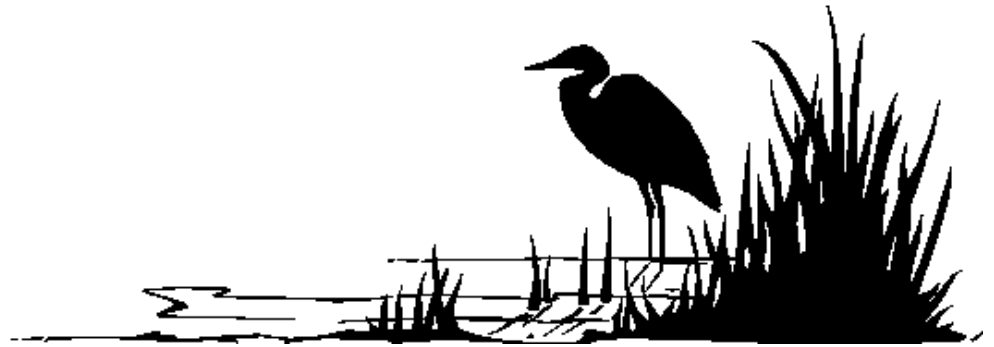
Another worry of the staff is that the refuge

cannot adequately monitor what is happening on the refuge lands and waters. The majority of the property on the refuge is closed to the public, and without a Law Enforcement Officer on premises and out in the field to engage with the people utilizing the refuge, they worry they could be missing violators who are trespassing and disturbing wildlife and destroying habitat. They are forced to rely on the public to help report problems such as hunting, fishing, and camping in restricted areas. The refuge staff has also been increasingly reliant on volunteers to keep the refuge Visitor’s Center open to the public. But those volunteers only have limited time to give, so the public consistently finds the building locked and inaccessible when the staff is out in the field doing their work.

The Friends of Missisquoi NWR, the non-profit group that works to support the refuge, has been doing all it can to help the refuge through this ongoing crisis. The Friends are playing a crucial role at the refuge by providing events that highlight the refuge, supporting the refuge financially for education and invasive species control, and volunteering hours of their own time to help with habitat management work. However, the Friends support cannot adequately fill the roles of the missing staff.

What can you do to help the refuge? First, consider joining the Friends of Missisquoi NWR, as it is the only organization that directly supports the refuge with its needs. Second, please consider calling or writing to Representative Balint and Senators Sanders and Welch to express your support for adequate funding for Missisquoi NWR. Let them know the importance of refuge lands and waters to wildlife and that more funding is needed to keep the National Wildlife Refuge System, Missisquoi included, alive and well. Do it so that all refuge managers can take pride in the feeling that the work that they do “protects habitat so important for a diverse assemblage of wildlife,” as Ken relates, and so that we all continue to have the ability to “see the wildlife we protect and manage – the thrill and beauty of seeing thousands of migratory waterfowl resting and feeding in our protected wetland areas!”

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.)