



# MISSISQUOI MATTERS

NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF  
MISSISQUOI NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Winter, 2024-2025



## Winter Activities Schedule at Missisquoi NWR *29 Tabor Road, Swanton, VT 05488*

**Bird Tales**

**Thursday, February 6, 2025, 7:00 PM via Zoom**

Birds have the capability to move people: move them physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Join us on February 6th for “An Evening of Bird Tales”, an entertaining night of avian storytelling. Listen as our presenters give us a window into where birds have taken them. Amazingly, 2025 will mark the 10th year of this popular event! Registration information for this online event can be found on our website calendar: [www.friendsofmissisquoi/calendar](http://www.friendsofmissisquoi/calendar). We hope you join in on the fun!



## Missisquoi at Night

Occasionally, through the winter

Have you ever wondered what it's like to look through a high quality telescope; to be able to see objects hidden from the naked eye in the night sky? Well, stop wondering and come visit us at Missisquoi NWR Visitor's Center when Friends Member Brian Johnson has his powerful telescope set up! Brian will offer views of the constellations, planets, the Milky Way, galaxies, star clouds, & nebulae. Just bring some warm clothes and your sense of adventure. The next scheduled event is for **Friday, Dec. 6th beginning at 5:30 pm**. Rain/cloud date is Saturday, Dec. 7th. Going forward, keep an eye on our Calendar and the Friends Facebook Page for the next "Missisquoi at Night." Hope to see you there! Please register for this free event at <https://friendsofmissisquoi.org/calendar/>



## Owl Prowl

Friday, March 14, 5:30 PM

Join Friends Board members Ken Copenhaver and Tom Hargy for an evening walk to watch and listen for some of our resident birds who operate during the night shift. Recorded owl calls will be played to inspire responses or close encounters, if the birds are willing.

The MNWR owl prowl is on Friday evening, March 14, 2025 (featuring a full moon!), from 6:30 PM until about 9 PM. We will meet at the Refuge Visitor Center on Tabor Rd. Dress appropriately and bring a low-intensity flashlight with you.

As a bonus, since March 14 is known by some as "Pi Day," we will first meet inside the Visitor Center to hear an introduction to owls and to eat pies provided by the Friends of Missisquoi! When it gets dark, we will head out onto the trail to look and listen for owls.

Registration for this activity is required. You may register for this event at the Friends website: <https://friendsofmissisquoi.org/calendar/>



Photo by Greg Hume

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 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:

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





## 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 better awareness, appreciation, conservation, and responsible utilization of the

Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge.

29 Tabor Road, Swanton, VT 05488

(802) 868-4781 ext 121

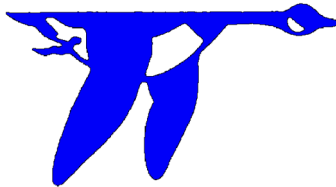
[www.friendsofmissisquoi.org](http://www.friendsofmissisquoi.org)

E-mail: [info@friendsofmissisquoi.org](mailto:info@friendsofmissisquoi.org)

Newsletter edited by Al Crist

### Board of Directors

Rich Kelley	<i>President</i>
Ken Copenhaver	<i>Vice Pres.</i>
Carol Yarnell	<i>Secretary</i>
Cathie Waltz	<i>Treasurer</i>
Julie Filiberti	
Jason Crooks	
Tom Hargy	
Scott Sainsbury	
Claire Payne	
Claudia Roberts	



### Refuge Staff

Ken Sturm	<i>Refuge Manager</i>
Judy Sefchick	<i>Wildlife Biologist</i>
Lisa Swainbank	
	<i>Office Administrative Assistant</i>
Chris Whitaker	
	<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 beginning at 8 AM on the **third Saturday of each month (except for December, when it is on the 2nd Saturday)**. 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 176 months of walks, we have recorded 166 species of birds. Lincoln Sparrow is the latest species to be added to the list. It was seen on the Discovery Trail on the October Walk. Registration for the walks is not required.

The schedule for the next three months is:

**December 14: Maquam/Black Creek Trail.** Meet at the parking lot located on Rte. 78, approximately 2½ miles west of Swanton village.

**January 18: Old Railroad Passage Trail:** Meet at the parking lot on Tabor Rd, about a mile past the refuge Visitor Center

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



Lincoln Sparrow

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](http://www.friendsofmissisquoi.org) and click on "Calendar".

For more information about the refuge, visit [www.fws.gov/refuge/missisquoi/](http://www.fws.gov/refuge/missisquoi/)

## Refuge Managers Update - November, 2024



As fall winds down and early winter approaches, refuge work changes along with the seasons. In many ways that is one of the real benefits of working on a National Wildlife Refuge.

Seasonal changes bring different species of wildlife to the refuge or shift the needs of resident species and require a refocus of refuge priorities. As these changes occur in nature, they are reflected in how people (and wildlife) use the refuge, which also alters our work priorities.

For many, the changes are limited to the foliage we all appreciate and the flocks of geese which materialize in the sky in September and October. But as you become more tuned in to the natural world, nuances of change become apparent, like seeing the last mourning cloak butterflies still hanging on after all others seem to have disappeared. Or subtle changes in the calls and behavior of woodland birds, which are suddenly more muted and often found hanging out in “mobs” rather than spending much of their time alone or in pairs. It is these things which make living through the seasonal change so much richer, and also make spending time on a National Wildlife Refuge so much more rewarding.

*by Ken Sturm, Refuge Manager, Missisquoi NWR*

On the refuge we are moving through the waterfowl season, which has been a rather slow one for us at Missisquoi. While we had a bumper crop of wild rice, a favorite food for our migrating waterfowl, the low water conditions made much of the habitat unavailable. Hopefully we will see some rain in the coming weeks to improve the habitat conditions for the continued migration of waterfowl through the refuge.

As winter approaches, the refuge staff spends increasing amounts of time indoors as the cold weather drives many of our migratory birds south, and our fields and other habitats go dormant for the winter. This is a time for making sense of the previous field season and planning for the next. We will spend much time evaluating survey data and contemplating the strides we have made in invasive species control and other management actions. In many ways, it’s a time to catch our collective breath. But the beauty of refuge work is that we are always looking towards the next seasonal change, as this directs so much of our work.

I hope that many of you can experience these subtle changes on the refuge this fall and winter. But I especially hope that you are able to follow up throughout the seasons to see the remarkable changes nature brings to Missisquoi.

### **FRIENDS OF MISSISQUOI NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE BI-MONTHLY BOARD MEETINGS**

*Wednesday, January 8th, 2025 at 6:30 PM via Zoom*

*Wednesday, March 12th, 2025 at 6:30 PM via Zoom*

email [info@friendsofmissisquoi.org](mailto:info@friendsofmissisquoi.org) if you’d like to attend via Zoom

Members are always welcome & encouraged to attend.

Q. I've heard the reports about decreasing bird populations. What are the most important things I can do to help birds?

A. Yes, there is evidence from many studies that the total number of birds has drastically decreased. A report in 2019 in the journal *Science* is the most comprehensive and has gotten the most attention. By combining several large datasets, the authors concluded that North American bird populations have decreased 29% from 1970 to 2018. That's 2.9 billion birds! More information is available at [www.3billionbirds.org](http://www.3billionbirds.org)

So what can individuals do to help? Seven suggestions appeared as full-length articles in the *Bird Watcher's Digest* magazine from the January/February 2023 issue to the January/February 2024 issue.

**1. Buy Bird-friendly Coffee.** Most of the coffee in the world is grown in deforested areas where production is higher and the beans ripen faster. Clearing trees for coffee reduces biodiversity and is bird-unfriendly. But planting coffee trees near the edges of still-forested areas allows fragmented forests to regenerate and restore bird-friendly habitat. Look for coffee that is certified as "Smithsonian Bird Friendly" which assures that it is both shade-grown and organic. Note that the term "shade-grown" is not regulated, and coffee labeled as such might not be bird-friendly.

**2. Plant Native Plants.** If you live on a property where you can choose what grows there, work toward maximizing the number of native plants. This could be a 3-step process: 1) remove invasives; 2) reduce the lawn area; and 3) plant natives. Native plants can benefit birds both directly by providing food, cover, and nesting sites, and indirectly by providing habitat for insects.

Apps like **PlantNet**, **Picture This**, and **Seek** can help identify what's already in your yard.

**3. Reduce Window Collisions.** It is estimated that between 100 million and 1 billion birds die every year from window strikes. Most suffer brain injuries and broken bills, so even if they regain consciousness and fly off, they may not survive. Of course, many collisions are with large commercial buildings, but private homes contribute their share. First, consider the location of your bird feeders. They should be within 3 feet or greater than 15 to 25 feet from the nearest windows. This will reduce the chance of collision, but it's not a cure-all. The most effective deterrent is fritted glass, which is probably only an option for new construction or if your windows need replacing anyway. For existing windows, numerous products are available to create a pattern on the glass that birds will see and avoid. Use the 2x4 rule: Horizontal patterns must be less than 2 inches apart, and vertical patterns must be less than 4 inches apart. Some treatments are more visible to humans than others, so it's a compromise between protecting birds and how much of your view you're willing to sacrifice. I've had some success with a UV liquid from WindowAlert that is dabbed onto windows with an applicator. The dots aren't invisible but aren't too distracting, depending on the lighting. However, I haven't found any studies evaluating its effectiveness.

**4. Avoid Spraying.** While the problems caused by insecticides are mostly from large-scale agricultural sources, homeowners can also play their part by avoiding their use. Pesticides such as neonicotinoids kill insects indiscriminately, including valuable pollinators. Aside from not using pesticides, we can also contribute by buying organic foods, and practicing bird-friendly gardening and landscaping.

*continued >> page 6*

**5. Keep Cats Indoors.** Let's admit it; cats are an exotic invasive species. Domestic cats, both feral and pets, are estimated to kill roughly a billion birds a year. Keeping your cats indoors not only protects the birds, but keeps them safe from cars, wild animals, and even stray dogs that could hurt them. Personal story: My son's cat recently came home with a badly broken leg. The vet said it didn't look like it was hit by a car and possibly had gotten the leg wedged in a tree. So there are all kinds of dangers out there. Most cats adjust well to being indoor cats. You can also get creative and build an enclosed "catio" for a safe outdoor experience.

**6. Reduce Plastics Use.** Plastics are a global problem. Plastic pollution in the oceans endanger sea life though entanglement by fishing gear and ingestion of plastic pieces. "Plasticosis" has been observed in almost all sampled seabird species and can cause eventual death through organ failure. Plastics eventually break down into microplastics that can be found everywhere—even in human blood. Some things we can do to help: **REDUCE** your use of single-use plastics including bags, bottles, wraps, and disposable utensils. **REUSE** plastic containers several times before recycling them. **REPLACE** plastics by choosing glass containers (also ceramic, paper, cloth, wood, and metal in some cases) or, when possible, buying in bulk using your own containers. **RECYCLE** all plastics that are collected in your area, but be aware that only an estimated 10% of collected plastic is actually recycled, so consider this as a last resort. **RELOCATE** plastics by participating in Greenup Days and beach cleanups. **SUPPORT** businesses that are actively tackling the plastics problem (but

watch out for "greenwashing").

**7. Watch & Report Birds.** If you are already watching birds, put your observations to good use through citizen science projects (also known as community science) such as Project FeederWatch and Christmas Bird Counts (also called Winter Bird Counts in some areas). Some Vermont-specific opportunities are LoonWatch, Whip-poor-will surveys, and Mountain Birdwatch. For all your everyday birding, be sure to report your sightings to eBird. eBird was created by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and is now the largest database of bird records in the world with over 1.6 billion observations as of the end of last year.

Note that feeding birds is not on this list. In fact, feeders can lure birds closer to dangerous windows and cats, and large groups of birds congregating in one place can spread disease. In general, birds are able to fend for themselves with natural food. Exceptions might be during the coldest weather when they need all the calories they can get, or during an ice storm when much of their food might be inaccessible.

Again, I credit *Bird Watcher's Digest* for much of the information in this article. I highly recommend this magazine for its personal approach to writing about birds, including regular articles by well-known authors such as Scott Weidensaul and Julie Zickefoose. If you're only familiar with the older, "Reader's Digest" sized version of this magazine, be sure to check out their current standard-sized glossy edition.

Also, visit <https://www.facebook.com/friendsofmissisquoi> to learn more about the refuge and coming events. You can also look at, comment on, and share your own photos.

You do not need to have a Facebook account to view the page.



# National Wildlife Refuge Week a Huge Success

National Wildlife Refuge Week happened in a big way at Missisquoi this October! The week was filled with activities of all types.

The Big Sit!, a 12-hour birding event on the Stephen J. Young Marsh platform, kicked off the week on Saturday, October 12<sup>th</sup>.

On Sunday, the Friends held the first Missisquoi Wildlife Fair and Walk for the Wild.



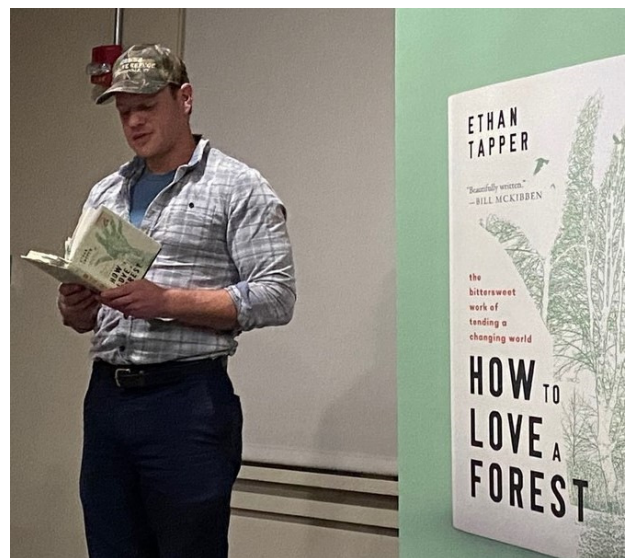
They were a big success. The day was filled with many presentations: the refuge and its wildlife, the lake, water quality, and the Missisquoi watershed. Information booths ranged from invasive pests and invasive Lampreys to recipes made with native foods. There was truly something for everyone.

The kids were entertained with a variety of crafts and painting and all the trails were open for exploration, including a 5K trail challenge on 3 of the trails and by a paddle on the Missisquoi. Although the Friends did not reach their goal in the Walk for the Wild fundraiser, participants and supporters sent over \$1200 in donations their way. Plans are already underway for next year's event. If you have an idea for something to include or you'd like to join in the planning, email the Friends at [info@friendsofmissisquoi.org](mailto:info@friendsofmissisquoi.org)



The mid-week events included Dr. Fred Wiseman presenting regional Abenaki history on 'Indigenous Peoples' Day, the Tsuchinshan-ATLAS Comet and a full moon making an appearance and Brian Johnson bringing his telescope to the refuge for a pop-up viewing event, and Ethan Tapper coming to Missisquoi to give an excellent talk and book reading from his newly released *How to Love a Forest*.

The Friends closed out the week with a gorgeous fall bird monitoring walk on the Stephen J. Young Marsh Trail the following Saturday.



# **Big Sit 2024 Results**

14 dedicated birders took part in our 8<sup>th</sup> “Big Sit!” event on Saturday, October 12<sup>th</sup>!

The Big Sit! is an international event, sponsored by the New Haven (CT) bird club that’s held annually in early October. It’s been described as a “tailgate party for birders.” The idea is to identify as many species of birds as possible on a single day while birding from within a 17-foot circle. As in years past, the location we’ve used is the observation deck at the Stephen J. Young Marsh.

Over 12 very windy hours, from 6:00 AM to 6:00 PM, we noted 29 species of birds, which was a new low for our Big Sit! The strong winds undoubtedly kept numbers down for the day. However, we added two new species to our lists:

American Black Duck, and Pied-billed Grebe. Other notable sightings included a Bald Eagle, Rusty Blackbirds, and a Sharp-shinned Hawk. Over the 8 years we’ve held this event, we’ve recorded a total of 69 species.

Data from Big Sit! circles around the world, including ours, is entered into eBird, an online database of bird observations run & maintained by Cornell University’s Lab of Ornithology. This data is available to scientists and researchers worldwide, providing information on migration patterns and bird distributions among other things.

If you’d like to get involved, our 9<sup>th</sup> annual event will tentatively be on Sat., Oct. 11<sup>th</sup>, 2025.



## **Species seen in 2024:**

- |                           |                              |                            |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. American Black Duck    | 11. Double-crested Cormorant | 21. Red-bellied Woodpecker |
| 2. American Crow          | 12. Downy Woodpecker         | 22. Red-winged Blackbird   |
| 3. American Goldfinch     | 13. European Starling        | 23. Rusty Blackbird        |
| 4. American Robin         | 14. Great Blue Heron         | 24. Sharp-shinned Hawk     |
| 5. American Woodcock      | 15. Green-winged Teal        | 25. Swamp Sparrow          |
| 6. Bald Eagle             | 16. Hermit Thrush            | 26. Turkey Vulture         |
| 7. Black-capped Chickadee | 17. Mallard                  | 27. White-throated Sparrow |
| 8. Blue Jay               | 18. Northern Flicker         | 28. Wood Duck              |
| 9. Canada Goose           | 19. Northern Harrier         | 29. Yellow-rumped Warbler  |
| 10. Common Raven          | 20. Pied-billed Grebe        |                            |



## **Who's Out & About on the Refuge?**

Meet Beth Deimling. Beth is a Friend AND a volunteer. You might find her at the Visitor Center front desk in the summer.

She was introduced to Missisquoi when she sought a way to get out and about in the cold winter months. She joined in on a monthly bird walk and has been a Friend ever since. Beth particularly likes taking in the refuge from the water. One of her most magical moments took place when she and her husband canoed down Dead Creek from Louie's Landing and saw all the terns, both Common and Caspian, on the sand spits at the creek's mouth. Another favorite was on a group paddle where they spotted Black Terns flitting overhead and a Spiny Softshell Turtle basking. These moments on the water remind her of a quote from Kenneth Grahame's *Wind in the Willows*: "there is nothing – absolutely nothing – half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats."

Beth's love of the outdoors stems from yearly cross-country camping trips with her parents and siblings. Her father's sense of wonder and curiosity about the natural world rubbed off on her, and she went on to gain degrees in biology and fisheries biology. Before retirement, she spent her

working career first in fisheries/freshwater biology and then in horticulture.

Even as a retiree, Beth is always looking for actions that she can take to help protect the natural world. She was recently appointed by Governor Scott to become the newest member of the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Board, as the representative from Grand Isle County. She felt it was important, as a non-hunter and non-fisher, to serve on the board to provide another perspective. She is serving to represent Vermonters who find joy in simply watching or photographing wildlife, those who are involved in improving their land to support wildlife, and those who simply appreciate the natural environment.



---

## **Meet New Board Member Claudia Roberts**

I bring with me an appreciation of the work that it takes to grow an organization and stay positive. I bring years of work experience and a love of birds, the natural habitat, and the creatures that we are lucky to have in Vermont.

I grew up on Long Island and, as a child, vacationed off the coast of Maine and on Cape Cod and spent a lot of time by the ocean, watching the sea-gulls and the movement of the sea. As a young adult I vacationed by a glacial lake near Montreal, enjoying listening to loons. I love watching and photographing

birds and other wildlife, and old barns and equipment. In Vermont, I volunteered on local indie films as crew and behind a camera. I love "street photography," capturing a funny or sweet moment, or simply an interesting scene. I have had a few careers in the private sector, in finance and in commercial real estate, and now work for the federal government.

After years of simply donating money to various national organizations that support wildlife, I am pleased to be involved locally and join the Board of the Friends of Missisquoi.

## **Meet New Board Member Claire Payne**

Claire Payne is a storyteller through her art, blending talents as a commercial artist, wildlife photographer, and fine artist to create pieces that resonate with authenticity and passion. From designing vibrant graphics and product photography to illustrating bold, captivating wildlife paintings, Claire brings creativity and purpose to every project.

Her love for nature is the heartbeat of her work. Whether exploring Vermont's trails with a camera or meticulously painting the fine details of a bird's feather, Claire captures the natural world with extraordinary depth and realism. Her wildlife paintings, showcased in galleries and exhibitions, are a testament to her unique style: vivid, textured, and alive with emotion.

Art has always been a part of Claire's life. As a child, she spent countless hours sketching and studying her surroundings. This passion led her to art school, where she honed her skills and developed her

distinctive voice as an artist. Today, she uses her work to inspire others to cherish and protect nature's wonders.

Claire lives in Vermont with her husband Joe. When not creating art, they enjoy gardening, hiking, and exploring new places, always seeking the next source of inspiration.



---

## **A Thank You From Alnôbaiwi**

Alnôbaiwi (in the Abenaki Way) is an organization whose mission is to preserve, practice, and educate people about Abenaki tradition. When we found a downed green White Pine tree asking to become a Logboat - in the traditional way, by burning her out. We found the funding to get her done, and a place in the Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge to do the burn. We cut the tree's trunk from the shattered stump and tested the log for rot, transported her from Westford to the Missisquoi Wildlife Refuge,



organized a 6 day and night burn, launched her in the Missisquoi, and then trucked her to our Welcoming Center in the Winooski River Intervale in Burlington. We hope to put her back in the Missisquoi in the Spring of 2025 to lead the "Blessing of the Waters" program, an Abenaki initiative to raise awareness about improving the ecology of Pitabagokh – Lake Champlain, "the water between."

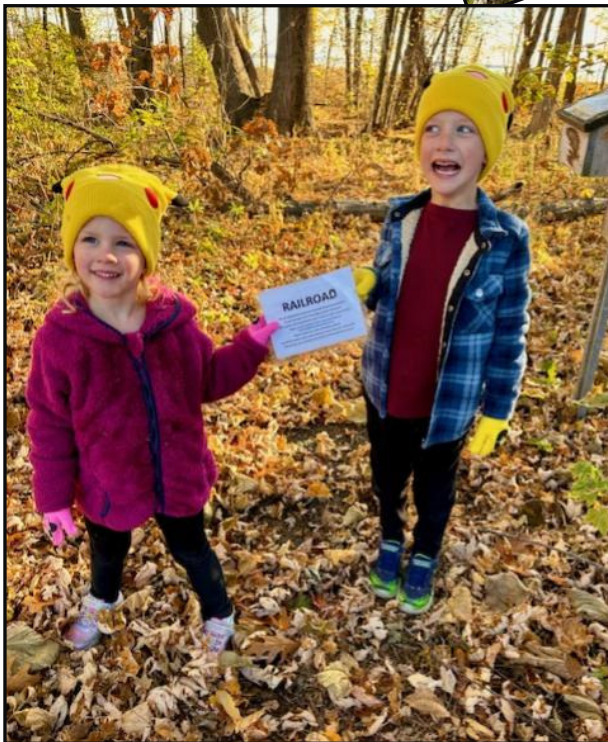
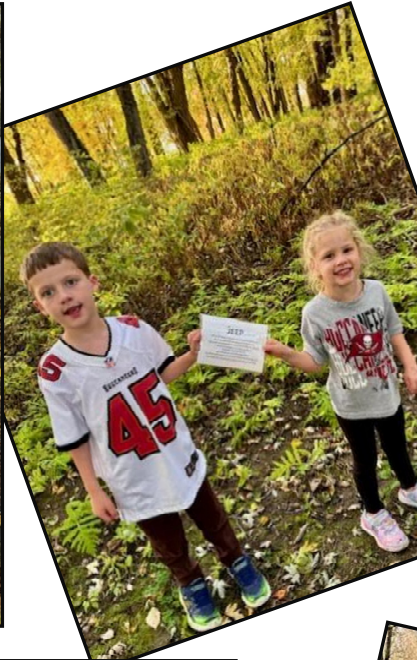
This Logboat project brought many people together, Abenaki and friends. It was tradition, it was theater, and it was collective. Much spirit, wisdom, and creativity converged to help the Spirit of the White Pine transition to become the Spirit of the Logboat. We thank the Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge for hosting our burn encampment at Louie's Landing for a week and for being an essential part of the Logboat Project.

Kchi Wliwni (Big Thanks),  
David Schein  
Administrative Coordinator, Alnôbaiwi

## **Have You Tried the Five Trail Challenge?**

The Russell family from Alburgh did. Hike all five refuge trails. Take a picture of the trail card that's in a wooden box alongside each trail. Selfies are preferred! Send your pictures to [trailcards@](mailto:trailcards@)

[friendsofmissisquoi.org](http://friendsofmissisquoi.org) and we'll send you sew-on embroidered patches for everyone who hiked the trails. Maybe you'll even find your selfie(s) in the newsletter!



**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](mailto: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.)