

# Johnson Farm Wildlife Management Area

## General Description

Johnson Farm Wildlife Management Area (WMA) is located in northeastern Vermont, in the towns of Lemington and Canaan. The state of Vermont owns 282.7 acres and manages public access on an additional 129.9 acres on the adjacent conserved farm. Johnson Farm WMA is embedded within a large, productive dairy farm which plays an important role in the local economy. The agricultural lands are interspersed with high quality oxbow wetlands, scrub-shrub swamps, emergent marshes, and floodplain forests. The WMA is comprised of four separate parcels, each having their own access off of Route 102. Information kiosks and parking are provided at two sites, one in Canaan, and the other in Lemington on adjacent privately-owned land that the landowner has maintained for the public's enjoyment for years.

## History

The WMA is part of the former Johnson Farm which encompassed a total of 1,023 acres along over six miles of Connecticut River shoreline, notable for its significant habitat diversity, its long and scenic Connecticut River frontage, and abundance of significant natural features. The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department (VFWD) worked collaboratively with the Vermont Land Trust (VLT) and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) to determine the boundaries, and the property was divided up between what is now the 266 acre Johnson Farm WMA, and the remaining 587 acres which is now a VLT-conserved operating farm. The conservation easement on the 129.3 acres of riparian buffer and wetlands embedded within the farmland was assigned to the VFWD, which manages those areas as if they were owned outright for natural area conservation and public access. Shortly after closing on the Johnson Farm WMA, VFWD also purchased an in-holding formerly owned by Gerald and Jacqueline Leigh. This 16.7 acre parcel includes approximately 3 acres along Route 102 that are non-forested, and a +/- 14 acres tamarack swamp which formed in an old oxbow of the Connecticut River. The addition of the Leigh parcel provided an excellent site for public access.

## Habitat Features

Johnson Farm WMA contains over eight miles of river and stream frontage, including 6.1 miles along the Connecticut River, and 1.9 miles on 3 tributaries. Approximately 192 acres (68%) of the WMA is covered with open or shrub wetlands. The majority consists of old "oxbows", former river channels now dominated by alder swamp or sedge meadow, and shrub-scrub swamps, emergent marshes, and floodplain forests. Five outstanding oxbow wetland complexes incorporate eight different wetland community types, including alder swamp, sedge meadow, shallow emergent marsh, deep broadleaf marsh, cattail marsh and river mud shore. There are 100 acres of farmland which will eventually be restored to wetland or buffer as well.

In addition to natural heritage and agricultural values, the Johnson property holds great recreational significance, treasured locally for duck-hunting and fishing.

## Common Fish and Wildlife

**Mammals** Common mammals on the WMA include white-tailed deer, black bear, otter, mink, beaver, muskrat, coyote, and red fox.

**Birds** This is an excellent site for waterfowl such as wood ducks, Canada geese and mallards. Other wetland species such as great blue heron and bitterns occur here. Upland game birds present are ruffed grouse, wild turkey and American woodcock. There are also grassland birds such as bobolink.

**Reptiles and Amphibians** This WMA supports a variety of reptiles and amphibians associated with open water wetlands and marshes. Green, pickerel, northern leopard, and bullfrogs may be found along with spring peepers. Turtle species may include snapping and painted. Milk, northern water, and garter snakes may be present as well

**Fish** Warm water fish species occur on the property in the wetlands, and the Connecticut River can be easily accessed from the WMA. This section of the Connecticut River and its tributaries holds both wild and stocked brook, brown, and rainbow trout.

Johnson Farm WMA is open to regulated hunting, trapping, fishing, hiking, and wildlife viewing.