



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge

Refuge Happenings

June 2024: *The Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge presently includes twenty-three different divisions and units, located 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.*

Storrs Library Summer Reading Kickoff Event



Photo Credit: USFWS

More than one hundred children and adults participated in the Longmeadow, MA Storrs Library Summer Reading Kickoff event! Conte Park Ranger Tasha Daniels, and Friend's of Fannie Stebbins members hosted an information and activity table that promoted nature inspired summer reading lists, and encourage families to visit the Fannie Stebbins Refuge in Longmeadow, MA on Pondside Road. Visitors to the table were encouraged to read their books outside at the pond pavilion. The families also enjoyed touching raccoon, red fox, and mink pelts, and holding the American black bear skull as well!

For more information contact: Tasha_Daniels@fws.gov

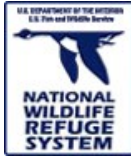
Cops & Bobbers, Hooks & Ladders Youth Fishing



Photo credit: USFWS

Conte Refuge helped host another successful Cops & Bobbers, Hooks & Ladders Youth Fishing event this spring. Law enforcement officers, fire fighters, and emergency officials were all present in Granby, MA for the event that attracted over 100 people. Partners included Mass Wildlife, UMass Amherst, Towns of Amherst, Granby, and Belchertown, Mass State Police, Hampshire County Sheriff's Office, MA Environmental Police and USFWS Law Enforcement officers. Trout Unlimited also contributed, bringing volunteers to help families fish, and teach interested folks how to tie flies. Fish for the event were supplied by the USFWS Berkshire National Fish Hatchery. This treasured event brings together members of the community in a positive, fun, and educational environment. We look forward to doing this event each year.

For more information contact: Jennifer_Lapis@fws.gov



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Kestrel Nesting Boxes Show Promise



For more than 10 years, staff and volunteers at the Kestrel Land Trust have managed a kestrel nest box program, monitoring and banding kestrel chicks that hatch in nest boxes they place throughout the Valley. Several of these nest boxes are located at Conte's Fort River Division. We are happy to announce that at least two of the boxes at the refuge have had chicks hatch this season. The grassland habitat around the Fort River Division is an ideal habitat for nesting adult kestrels to lay eggs and feed their young.

For more information contact: Dean_Rhine@fws.gov

Photo Credit: Kestrel Land Trust

Applying Classroom Lessons To Real-World Land Management



Conte staff worked in partnership with the Hartsbrook Waldorf School in Hadley MA, conducting environmental education programs with high school students, focusing on the study of wetlands and hydrology in the Fort River Watershed. Using the Refuge's river table, the classroom teacher demonstrated the effects changes in the landscape have on how water flows through the system. Students were then able to relate these classroom studies to real-world observations when they visited the Fort River Division on a beautiful spring day.

For more information contact: Jennifer_Lapis@fws.gov

Photo Credit: Alex Lester

New Signs At Milford Point, McKinney Refuge



Steward B. McKinney Refuge Manager received help from both volunteers and refuge operation technicians to install new entry signs at both sides of the beach at the Milford Point Unit. The newly branded blue signs are a change from the original brown style signs that were used for many years. In addition, the new entry sign features a great blue heron "animal ambassador" to welcome visitors.

For more information contact: Shaun_Roche@fws.gov

Photo: USFWS



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Purple Martins Nesting At The Fort River Division



Thanks to a dedicated group of volunteers, a pair of purple martins have been observed nesting at the Fort River Division. In addition to the nesting pair, other individual purple martins have been observed visiting the nesting site and exploring the gourds. Purple martin populations have been in decline in Massachusetts, partly due to habitat loss. These aerial insectivores only nest in pre-existing cavities, such as old wood pecker holes or hollowed out gourds, which need to be provided by humans. Refuge staff installed plastic gourds at the Fort River Division a few years ago, but there has been little activity from the purple martins until this year, mostly due to the great help from volunteers actively managing and monitoring the nesting boxes.

Photo: Mary McKittrick

For more information contact: David_Sagan@fws.gov

Environmental Education in the Upper CT River Watershed



Conte Refuge staff spoke with 4th, 5th, and 6th grade students from a local school in northern Vermont. Discussion topics focused on the USFWS, Silvio O. Conte Refuge, and the importance of conservation, which were all relevant to the current curriculum standards and lesson plans the students were learning in the classroom.

Photo Credit: M. Sheehy

For more information contact: Rachel_Cliche@fws.gov

Heavy Equipment Training For Employees



Heavy Equipment trainer Chad Roderick provided Conte Refuge staff with two days of heavy equipment training at the Nulhegan Basin Division. Types of equipment that employees were trained to use included skid steer, dozer, backhoe and Ag tractor.

For more information contact: Steve_Agius@fws.gov

Photo Credit: USFWS



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Chronic Wasting Disease Pre-planning Meeting



A two-day meeting was held by the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department to discuss the potential spread of Chronic Wasting Disease into the State of Vermont. Participants included state and federal land/wildlife management employees. The pre-planning meeting was held to discuss what is currently known about the disease. At this time, there is no indication that Chronic Wasting Disease is in Vermont.

For more information contact: Steve_Agius@fws.gov

Photo: VTFWD

Winter Storm Damage Tree Removal



The winter storms of 2023/2024 severely impacted the infrastructure at the Northern Conte Divisions. Dozens of miles of trails and roads were impacted by downed trees. The access road to the Pondicherry crew quarters was impassible for a period of time due to one of the winter storm events. Refuge staff and volunteers have been systematically removing downed trees and reopening roads and trails across the refuge divisions in New Hampshire and Vermont.

For more information contact: Steve_Agius@fws.gov

Photo Credit: USFWS

Putney Mountain



The legs on the trailhead kiosk at the Putney Mountain Unit deteriorated to the point where the kiosk fell over. Refuge staff replaced the rotten legs with new timbers. The kiosk and interpretive map provide visitors with information about the wildlife, habitat and trail system at the property.

For more information contact: Steve_Agius@fws.gov

Photo Credit: USFWS



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Veteran's Fishing Program



Photo: VTFWD

The first of Conte's Annual Summer Veteran's Fishing Programs was held this month for disabled veteran's, who come from the Veteran's Affairs Medical Center in Leeds, MA. Each summer, veteran's from the center enjoy several days of fishing in a stocked pond located at the Cronin Aquatic Resource Center. Fish from the Berkshire National Fish Hatchery are used to stock the pond. Volunteers from the local community, and the local Chapter of Trout Unlimited assist with the event.

For more information contact: Jennifer_Lapis@fws.gov

Veterans Enjoy A Day On The Water



Photo Credit: USFWS

The Friends of Outer Island hosted a Veteran's Event for 24 local veterans from the organization "Hooks for Heroes", in Southern Connecticut. The trip included a scenic ferry ride to and from the island, a tour of the island, food and drink, games and activities, and treasured companionship. Special Thank You to Friends members Bernadette Southwick for organizing the event, and Jim Lockhart who led the tour.

For more information contact: Shaun_Roche@fws.gov

Falkner Island 2024 Common Tern Census Complete



Photo Credit: USFWS/Deanna Broderick

On June 4th, Refuge staff and volunteers completed the 2024 common tern census on Falkner Island, off the coast of Connecticut. In the spirit of collaboration, Rhode Island National Wildlife Refuge complex and the Audubon Alliance sent their staff to assist. The census was originally scheduled for June 13th, but this year the terns hatched more than a week early! Most tern colony managers are reporting earlier lay and hatch dates for their terns. In the end, we counted 1359 nests – most had 3 eggs. This is slightly higher than our 2022 census count (up by 250 nests) but much lower than the average of 2,500 nests/nesting pairs.

For more information contact: Kristina_Vagos@fws.gov



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Proud Participant in Project Poop



Photo: USFWS/Deanna

Staff at Stewart B. McKinney Refuge are collecting tern fecal matter for an Atlantic flyway collaborative survey on the diets of common terns and black skimmers. The project is being led by Linda Welch from Maine Coastal Island NWR, Ruth Boettcher from VA Department of Wildlife Resources, and Gemma Clucas from Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Eighty eDNA samples have been collected from Falkner Island – 40 from common tern adults and 40 from chicks. Twenty of the adult samples were from the incubation period and the other 20 were collected during chick rearing. This sample of the terns' diet will give the refuge an idea of the fish species on which the common terns are feeding. They can also compare the Falkner samples with other participating colonies.

For more information contact: Kristina_Vagos@fws.gov

Home School Students Enjoyed Ponding At The Refuge



Photo Credit: USFWS

An organized group of home school families have become regulars at the Fort River Division, using the refuge as an outdoor exploratory classroom. This month, a crew of 10 students, and their adults spend a full morning learning about the value of wetlands, pond life, and outdoor recreation. They were extremely excited to catch frogs, tadpoles, and other living organisms in the education pond. We know this group will be back for another outdoor adventure in the fall.

For more information contact: Jennifer_Lapis@fws.gov

YMCA Returns To Calf Island



Photo Credit: USFWS

The US Fish and Wildlife Service purchased Calf Island from the Greenwich Family YMCA in 2003. Now, 21 years later, they have returned. This month, six volunteers from the YMCA visited Calf Island, clearing trash around the coastline helping to maintain its pristine condition. The group particularly enjoyed the boat ride from the mainland to the island, provided by Refuge staff Sean Healy and Jeremy Keeler. They were not as keen about the number and size of mosquitos that greeted them on the island, but lots of bug spray helped to keep them at bay. After three hours of work, the group ate their lunch at the Grass Island Boat Ramp, enjoying the rest of the beautiful day.

For more information contact: Shaun_Roche@fws.gov