

Ownership and How to Visit

The Dorset Marsh wetland complex is located within the town of Dorset. It is owned both by private and public entities. Numerous private parcels encompass parts of the wetland, so overall access to the entirety of the wetland is challenging. Access can also be challenging in some areas due to the areas of standing water, flowing streams and the micro-topography created by the vegetation with hummocks and hollows, or the dense vegetation in some community types.

Areas easily accessed by the public or are available for access include Prentiss Pond. Dorset Fire District No. 1 owns 10.4 acres of land which includes Prentiss Pond, gifted to the Nature Conservancy, and ultimately transferred to the Fire District. This waterbody is large enough to accommodate a canoe or kayak. There is a small (ca. 80 x 150 ft) area of rich fen along the west side of the pond. The fen also has a population of the rare (S2) gray willow (*Salix pedicellaris*). The peat depth varies from 60 to 70 cm and is very decomposed. Fishing can also occur in the pond.

Dorset Marsh Wetland Complex: Vermont CLASS I WETLAND

There is a large body of information that helps define the area of the Dorset Marsh Wetland Complex and documents the functions and values that it offers within the landscape. The Natural Heritage Inventory Program identified the [alder] shrub community type and other RTE species within the wetland and it has been described as having state significance. The wetland complex overall is significant for all ten (10) functions and values as identified under Vermont Wetland Rules and is considered exemplary or irreplaceable for three of them; rare, threatened or endangered species habitat, irreplaceable for wildlife and bird habitat and education and research opportunities

for these reasons above and for meeting the criteria and sub-criteria outlined for a Class I wetland including landscape association and connectivity, the Dorset Marsh Wetland Complex met the criteria for reclassification from a Class II wetland to a Class I wetland with a buffer established at 100-ft in 1992.



The Exemplary or Irreplaceable Functions and Values of the Dorset Marsh Wetland

- ◆ Wildlife and Migratory Bird Habitat
- ◆ Rare, Threatened, or Endangered Species
- ◆ Education and Research in Natural Sciences



The area of Class I wetland occurring within the Dorset Marsh is located wholly within Dorset between Church Street to the north (Prentiss Pond) and Cross Street to the south, sandwiched between Route 30 to the east and West Road to the west. The area it encompasses is greater than 200 acres.

The State of Vermont ranks the significance of wetlands based on 10 functions and values they provide for the general public and the environment. Based on the evaluation of these functions and values, the Dorset Marsh Wetland Complex is highly significant for all ten and deemed exceptional or irreplaceable for three as outlined in the sidebar; hence it's reclassification to a Class I wetland in 1992.

Dorset Marsh has been described as the fifth largest wetland in Bennington County. It provides one of the richest hydrophytic (water tolerant) vegetation habitats, and exhibits the best example of open sedge and cattail meadow in the county. This wet-



Dorset Marsh Class I Wetland

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land is a dynamic system offering a variety of habitats for different species and supports a number of RTE species currently and likely in the future. This wetland supports a diversity of wildlife habitat through natural communities, structural diversity, interspersions of habitats and edges. The Dorset Marsh wetland complex has at least seven community types present. It is the headwaters of both the Batten Kill and the Mettowee Rivers (Basin 01 - Batten Kill, Walloomsac, Hoosic Tactical Basin Plan - Final 2015).

In August of this year, 2018, a team of biologists from the State of Vermont Wetlands Program will be collecting bioassessment data including information on plant species and vegetative communities, soils, and water quality. The Wetlands Program will complete a Vermont Rapid Assessment Method data form used to evaluate overall wetland quality and condition during the site visit. The site visit will help provide the ground truthing needed to produce a more accurate natural community map.

Dorset Marsh Wetland Complex

What is a Class I Wetland?

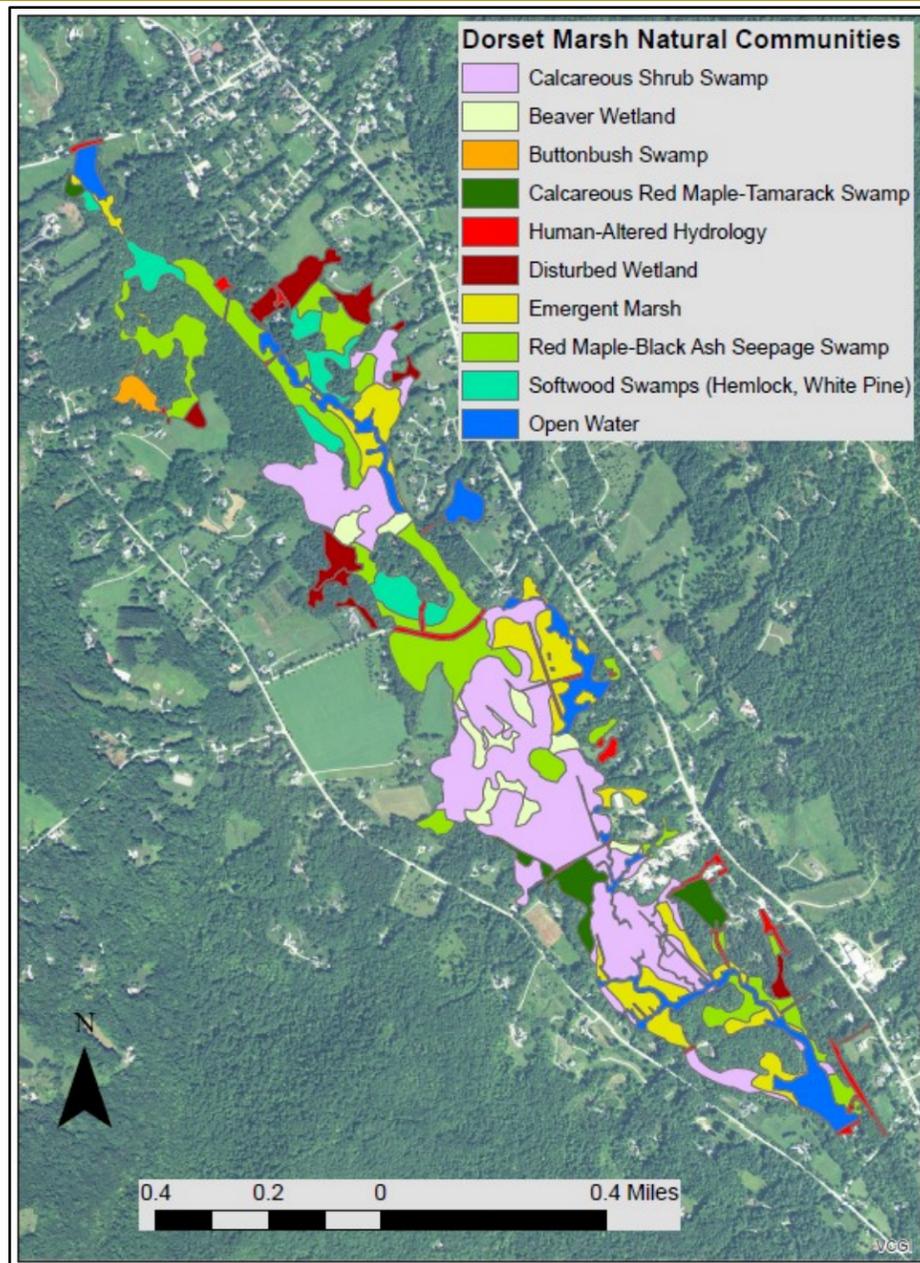
These wetlands have a high rating in one or more of the listed 10 functions and values. They are healthy, in great condition, and intact. A Class I wetland is considered exceptional or irreplaceable, and deserves the highest level of protection under the Vermont Wetland Rules. Criteria and sub-criteria have been developed to evaluate these special wetlands.

Criteria

- ◆ Representative Example of Wetland Type
- ◆ Rare Community Type
- ◆ Community Assemblage/ Wetland Complex
- ◆ Landscape Association

Subcriteria

- ◆ Rare, Threatened, or Endangered Species
- ◆ Undisturbed Condition
- ◆ Intact Landscape



Wildlife & Ecology

The Dorset Marsh wetland is composed of a diversity of habitats; forested, scrub/shrub, emergent, open water components and stream flow areas. This lends itself to supporting a diversity of fish, wildlife and bird species either directly or indirectly.

Birds & Bird Habitat

The Dorset Marsh abounds with birds and bird habitat. In particular, the Dorset Marsh benefits migrating waterfowl. Due to the presence of springs, the open

water areas of the wetland typically stay open late into the fall season. In addition, the Audubon Society has documented the presence of over 58 species of birds during a Breeding Bird survey, ranging from the many species of ducks and geese to osprey. The marsh is used for breeding by Virginia rails, American bittern, great horned owl, eastern blue bird, northern harrier, and numerous song birds including a variety of warblers, wrens, swallows and sparrows.

Mammals & Mammal Habitat

The Dorset Marsh exhibits many

features indicating that it is valuable for mammals. Muskrat, otter, and mink find ample habitat in different areas within the Wetland Complex. Muskrat is an important prey item for many carnivores. Mink and otter are considered area-sensitive carnivores that require large home ranges. Thus, both species are vulnerable to habitat loss and degradation. Because of its size and natural state, the Dorset Marsh supports the home range required for both mink and otter and provides the connectivity need-

ed for travel north and south.

The Dorset Marsh also provides habitat for beavers. Beavers are considered a "keystone species," one that changes the landscape in significant ways and creates critical habitat for numerous other species. Beavers increase the extent of flooded areas contributing to the creation and maintenance of the varied natural communities, waterfowl and wetland dependent song bird habitat, feeding/drinking areas for other species, like the little brown bat, and denning and feeding habitat for otter, mink, and muskrat.

Amphibians & Reptiles

There is extensive habitat available in the Dorset Marsh for amphibians and reptiles. On the VT Atlas for Amphibians and Reptiles, numerous species of turtles, snakes, frogs/toads and salamanders have been documented in the town of Dorset, and many likely utilize the marsh system and its different habitats.

Fisheries

The Dorset Marsh not only contains fish within its areas of open water, but it is also the headwaters for the Mettowee and Batten Kill Rivers, both renown as trout rivers. This makes Dorset Marsh an important fisheries habitat, directly and indirectly.

Natural Communities & Rare, Threatened & Endangered Species Habitat:

The Dorset Marsh is composed of several natural community types. Within the decision by the Water Resources Board, some of the community types were described "Dorset Marsh is one of five limy hemlock swamps in the state. Moreover, Dorset Marsh is considered to be one of the top 10 fens in Vermont. It is the only known wetland complex in Bennington County that combines shrub swamp, fen and hemlock swamp. Dorset Marsh provides one of the richest hydrophytic vegetation habitats, and exhibits the best example of open sedge and cattail meadow in the county.

The Nongame & Natural Heritage Program considers Dorset Marsh to be of state ecological significance based on the presence of a high-quality shallow shrub swamp, which consists of low sedge hummocks and scattered small shrubs.

Dorset Marsh supports uncommon plant species including: Hill's pondweed (*Potamogeton hillii*), showy yellow lady's slipper (*Cypripedium reginae*); and Makasin's yellow lady's-slipper (*Cypripedium parviflorum*); and

the marsh supports rare plant species including: water sedge (*Carex aquatilis*), gray willow (*Salix pedicellaris*), and a grass species named *Alopecurus dequalis*.

In Vermont, water sedge is currently known from only approximately 12 sites. Small yellow lady's-slipper is known from less than 20 sites. This extensive calcareous wetland system is potential habitat for several other rare calciphitic wetland plant species.

Education and Research

The rare orchids from Dorset Marsh have been featured in books, articles and lectures. Study plates on native Vermont species were created and are currently used by UVM.

Dorset Marsh has been the subject of environmental studies for the Nature Conservancy and the State of VT; data will be collected in 2018 as part of a state-wide wetland study on wetland quality and condition.

Dorset Marsh is used by VINS, the VNRC, the Dorset Citizens for Responsible Growth, UVM and local schools for educational purposes.



Dorset Marsh Wetland Complex Class I Summary

- ◆ Rare Community
- ◆ Contains an **Community Assemblage**
- ◆ Representative Example of Wetland Types
- ◆ Is unique for **Landscape Association**
- ◆ Multiple **RTE Species**
- ◆ Provides **Connectivity**
- ◆ Contributes to **Research and Education**
- ◆ Provides exceptional **wildlife and migratory bird habitat**

