Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge Designated as a Ramsar site; Wetland of International Importance

The Missisquoi Delta and Bay Wetlands

Ramsar Sites are designated because they are considered Wetlands of International Importance. These wetlands contain representative, rare or unique wetland types, and they are important for conserving biological diversity. Only 38 Ramsar sites are in the U.S. of the 2,200 Ramsar sites identified in the world. The Missisquoi Delta and Bay wetlands is the only Ramsar Site in Vermont; the designation encompasses nearly 7,665 acres, and includes the Missisquoi NWR and the VT F&W's Maquam Wildlife Management Area (WMA), Carmens Marsh WMA, and Rock River WMA.

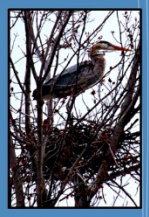
The Missisquoi Delta and Bay Wetland is important for maintaining the biological diversity of the region, due to its size, location, and variety of habitats. The floodplain forest, scrub-shrub wetlands, swamps, and emergent wetlands (dominated by soft-stemmed plants) provide habitat for a large number of different animals, such as the river otter and 34 other mammals, over 200 species of migratory and resident birds, numerous insects/pollinators, amphibians, reptiles, fish, mussels and a variety of plant species. Some plants, birds and animals found within the wetland are Rare, Threatened, or Endangered (RTE) within the state.

The wetland also provides floodwater storage, protects water quality including protection of our drinking water, and helps stop land along the river or lakeshore from washing away. There are almost 2,000 acres of floodplain forest and an extensive wetland grassland which grows along both the Missisquoi River and Lake Champlain shoreland. There are two Research Natural Areas specifically identified within the wetland; scientists and students conduct research.

In addition, the presence of the Missisquoi wetland system s a driver of the local economy. Hunters and fishermen, bird watchers, hikers, kayakers and motorized boaters use and enjoy the wetland. These visitors support the local economy through their purchase of food, fuel, lodging, and purchase of activity related equipment (boats, clothes, hunting gear). Increased visitation to the refuge iover the years is considered by many to be the cornerstone of the Swanton revitalization effort, as refuge users contribute to the local economy

The Missisquoi Refuge budget provides approximately $400,000 per year to the local economy through staff salaries, expenditures for construction contracts on the refuge, and purchases from local businesses for operation and maintenance of the refuge.

Planning for the FUTURE



ECOLOGY

The Missisquoi Wetland is the largest wetland in the Lake Champlain Basin, containing the greatest contiguous floodplain forest in VT and unique habitat types such as the Maquam Bog, and the Pitch Pine Woodland, the only example of this type in VT.

The wetland is necessary for fish species that use the site as feeding, spawning and nursery grounds, including the state-endangered lake sturgeon. The wetland is also important for other RTE species.

The wetland is a breeding area for numerous species of birds; including the largest blue heron rookery in the state. The wetland also supports over 20,000 waterfowl during the autumn migration.

Why Missisquoi Wetlands Matter

As demonstrated by the Ramsar Site designation, this wetland is of International significance. It is a rare, intact and complex ecological system supporting a high degree of species and habitat biodiversity for VT and for the world. The wetlands also provide other functions and values at the highest level to VT; such as water quality, flood water storage, and recreation and economic benefits.

The presence of the wetland and the opportunities it provides has a cumulative economic impact and cannot be understated.

Approximately 80,000 visitors come per year with their consumption of goods and services, purchase/rental of equipment locally, and payment of fees for the use of shuttles and guide services.

Each year, Approximately 66 duck hunting permits, 100 big game and upland game hunting permits, and six special use permits are purchased for use within the refuge itself; however the fish and wildlife habitat the wetland provides has broader implications within the Lake Champlain Basin and overall VT economy.

A 2001 national survey of hunting, fishing, and wildlife watching showed that 569,000 Vermont residents and nonresidents fished, hunted, or watched wildlife in Vermont, and spent $386 million on these activities (USFWS & US Census Bureau 2003). Missisquoi Refuge is a premier spots where these outdoor wildlife enthusiasts spend time and money.

Contact Us:
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VERMONT DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION
WATERSHED MANAGEMENT DIVISION
WETLANDS PROGRAM

All photos taken at Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge by Ken Sturm/USFWS; 2011-2018