

Vermont Sporting Journal

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Cameron Merryfield



We return a portion of pre-tax profits as follows:
2% Hunting and Fishing Education * 2% Habitat Improvement * 2% Preservation of the Second Amendment

Chittenden Reservoir Walleye Fishing Restrictions Revised

Walleye fishing restrictions on Chittenden Reservoir have been modified to help improve fishing opportunities and natural reproduction of the walleye population, according to the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department.

Starting January 1, 2023, walleye fishing on Chittenden Reservoir will be as follows:

- **Legal Length Limit:** 18 to 20 inches. All walleye under 18 and over 20 inches must be released.
- **Daily Limit:** 1 walleye.
- **Open Season:** June 1 through March 15.

The “Test Water Designation” changes were made due to concerns over declining walleye size in the reservoir and the discovery by fisheries biologists in November that walleyes are now reproducing at the reservoir.

“We have been stocking walleyes into Chittenden Reservoir since 1993 and on an every-other-year basis since 2001, said Vermont Fish and Wildlife fisheries biologist Shawn Good. “Past fisheries surveys concluded that walleyes were not successfully reproducing. All walleyes collected and analyzed since stocking began in 1993 were hatchery fish, based on marks we apply to the fish in the hatchery for later identification.”

“However, in early November of 2022, we spent two nights electrofishing around the shoreline and collected 327 walleyes that were between 5 inches and 7 inches long. Walleyes this size in late fall would have hatched in the spring of 2022. We did not stock walleyes in 2022. The last year the Reservoir was stocked with hatchery fish was 2021.”

“These 5 to 7-inch walleyes were wild, naturally produced fish from the reservoir. Also, the 327 young walleyes is nearly three times as many

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as we would collect in the fall during a normal stocking year when up to 45,000 walleyes were stocked.”

“One of the objectives of the new Test Water Designation,” Good added, “is to protect prime spawning-sized walleyes, but also to allow some harvest of the most abundant sized walleyes at 18-20 inches. Restricting the harvest of walleyes over 20 inches will help rebuild the number of those larger fish and ensure they will continue spawning. We will



New walleye fishing restrictions for Chittenden Reservoir are intended to increase the number of larger walleyes to naturally reproduce and provide better fishing in the reservoir.

VTF&W photo by Shawn Good

monitor this emerging wild spawning success on the reservoir over time and determine if it continues, if it is consistent and if it is able to sustain the population and fishing pressure.”

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Vermonters Urged to Take Steps to Prevent Spread of Avian Influenza



Virus circulating in wild birds can be devastating to backyard and commercial flocks
VERMONT FISH & WILDLIFE - Press Release

The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department is reminding the public to take precautions around wild birds, as highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) continues to circulate in the state.

[Backyard flocks of domestic birds in Caledonia and Lamoille Counties have had to be destroyed](#) after exposure to the virus, commonly known as avian flu.

“Highly pathogenic avian influenza has been detected in more than 70 wild birds since March, with cases reported most months and in every region of the state,” said Wildlife Program Manager David Sausville. “Many exposures come from migrating birds, so we expect case numbers to drop as winter temperatures set in. However, Vermonters still need to be mindful that this disease is present in our birds.”

HPAI poses a low risk to human health. However, the virus causes severe illness and high mortality in poultry. Transmission from wild birds is a primary cause of infection in domestic flocks, and human exposure can contribute to spread of the virus.

“Avoiding contact with any birds that seem sick, and not handling wild birds in general, are the most important steps the public can take to prevent the spread of HPAI,” said Sausville.

Sausville also asked Vermonters to report sightings of multiple dead birds in the same area to wildlife officials. Reports can be made by email to fwinformation@vermont.gov, or by calling 802-828-1000.

People can find information to help distinguish between natural expected bird mortality versus something that may be more serious by visiting the [Fish and Wildlife Department’s HPAI web page](#). Sick birds should not be taken into homes or rehabilitation facilities, and [bird feeders should be washed frequently](#) and placed far away from areas that might bring wild birds into contact with domestic fowl.

Up-to-date guidance for minimizing the spread of HPAI from wild birds can be found in the department’s online HPAI bulletin via <https://vtfis-handwildlife.com>.

Vermont 2023 Hunting and Fishing Licenses and Lawbooks Available

VERMONT FISH & WILDLIFE - Press Release

Vermont 2023 hunting, trapping, and fishing licenses, as well as the 2023 lawbooks for these activities, are now available on the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department's website and wherever licenses are sold.

"License sales have helped pay for some of Vermont's greatest conservation successes," said Fish and Wildlife Commissioner Christopher Herrick, "from managing habitat for game species, to restoring our populations of the bald eagle and common loon."

With ice fishing opening around the state as soon as cold temperatures arrive in January, Vermonters are encouraged to pick up their 2023 licenses at the earliest convenience. Existing five year, permanent or lifetime licenses can be updated online on January 1.

License buyers can also easily add a \$15 Habitat Stamp to their purchase to further support habitat conservation in Vermont.

"In addition to updating your license, it is helpful for hunters, trappers, and anglers to pick up the current 2023 lawbooks," added Commissioner Herrick. "Hunters and trappers will find important details on several new laws passed in 2022, and anglers can revisit the simplified fishing regulations introduced last year."

Print copies of the 2023 Hunting & Trapping Lawbook and the 2023 Fishing Lawbook are available from license agents statewide. The department's website has links to online versions as well.



The 2023 Hunting & Trapping and Fishing Lawbooks provide a thorough reference on regulations, offer informative articles on topics like land management for wildlife habitat and feature striking images by New England wildlife photographers.

VTF&W Photo

FREE ICE FISHING DAY & FESTIVAL SATURDAY, JANUARY 28



Always wanted to go ice fishing but couldn't find a good excuse to get away? Now we have found that excuse for you: a "Free Ice Fishing Day" on the last Saturday in January.

Saturday, January 28, 2023 is Vermont's next free ice fishing day - a day when anyone, resident or nonresident, may go fishing in Vermont without a fishing license.

Saturday, January 29 Free Fishing Day

Vermont Fish & Wildlife's Ice Fishing Clinics for 2023

January 21 -- 9:00am - 11:45am

*Introduction to Ice Fishing at Lake Paran
Fishing Access*

Bennington

January 31 – 9:00am - 11:45am

*Introduction to Ice Fishing at Mallets
Bay Fishing Access*

Colchester

January 24 – 10:30 am - 1:00pm

*Introduction to Ice Fishing at Deweys
Mills Pond*

Quechee

February 4 – 8:30am - 11:30am

*Introduction to Ice Fishing at Deweys
Mills Pond*

Quechee

January 25 – 2:00pm - 4:30pm

*Introduction to Ice Fishing at Shelburne
Pond Fishing Access*

Shelburne

February 9 – 4:15p - 7:00pm

*Introduction to Smelt Ice Fishing at
Waterbury Reservoir, Blush Hill Rd,
Waterbury*

February 21 – 10:30am - 1:00pm

*Introduction to Ice Fishing at Deweys
Mills Pond*

Quechee



Great Ice Fishing Spots for Beginners

Elmore State Park: Lake Elmore has an abundant yellow perch population as well as northern pike. Walk out from the state park or the Fish and Wildlife Access Area at the south end of the lake and fish in 10 to 15 feet of water. Fish small jigs tipped with maggots for yellow perch or minnows under tip-ups for northern pike and bigger perch. Choose the end of the lake that offers the most protection from the wind.

Crystal Lake State Park: Crystal Lake has an abundant population of small lake trout. Walk out from the state park or the Fish and Wildlife Access Area near the south end of the lake and fish in 10 to 50' of water. Try jigging spoons like a Swedish Pimple just above the lake bottom. Or set minnows under tip-ups and place the bait on or near the bottom.

Maidstone Lake State Park: Maidstone Lake offers good fishing for lake trout. Walk out from the state park and fish in 10 to 50' of water. Try jigging spoons like a Swedish Pimple just above the lake bottom. Or set minnows under tip-ups. Maidstone Lake also has burbot, and you can catch them after dark by fishing a live or dead minnow on the lake bottom.

Molly's Falls Pond State Park: This pond has abundant northern pike and yellow perch. Walk out onto the ice from the Fish and Wildlife Access Area near Marshfield Dam and set tip-ups with large minnows off the bottom in 15-40' of water. Jig for Perch using small jigs hooked with maggots or small pieces of worm near flat bottoms with weeds in 10-30' of water. Set tip-ups for larger Perch using small minnows off the bottom in 15-40' of water.

Bomoseen State Park: Walk out from the state park beach 40-50 yards, staying along the south shoreline. Drill holes where you can find 5-8 feet of water and scattered weeds. You'll find yellow perch, sunfish, black crappie, and bass in this area. Use jigging rods rigged with small jigs and live bait (waxworms, minnows) or set baited tipups with your minnows set just above the top of the weeds.

Branbury State Park: The waters in front of this state park on Lake Dunmore provides good fishing for yellow perch, black crappie, large and smallmouth bass, northern pike and even lake trout. Walk out from the state park beach and veer to the right, set minnows 1 to 2' off the bottom on tipups in 8 to 12' of water along the Route 53 shoreline. Look for scattered weedbeds in 10 to 15' of water straight out from the small boat access at the left side of the state park beach. These weeds will hold perch, crappie, and bass. Going further out into 40-60' of water beyond the end of the beach will get you into lake trout territory. Jig or set minnows right on the bottom.

Knight Point State Park: This sheltered bay in the Champlain Islands is perfect for new anglers and young families. The state park provides easy access to productive shallow waters with lots of vegetation and habitat for perch, sunfish, bass, and pike. Drill holes in areas that are 5 to 8' of water and set up in areas where you can see scattered weeds under the ice. Small jigs tipped with waxworms and tipups with minnows will catch almost anything in the area.

Sandbar State Park: Located at the beginning of the Route 2 causeway heading onto the Champlain Islands, the waters around this state park provide great fishing for many species. On the north side of the causeway in front of and west of the state park, deeper water edges are great places to try for salmon cruising the drop along the causeway. Try setting tipups with minnows just under the ice. You might get some nice pike that hang around the deep weed edges too. On the south side of Route 2 across from the state park entrance is a the large shallow flat with abundant vegetation and provides great fishing for sunfish, perch, bass and pike. It offers easy walking access from the parking lot on the edge of the road. Small minnows on tipups will make for a fun, productive day!

South Bay of Lake Memphremagog: Park at the Fish and Wildlife Access Area at the north end of South Bay. Walk towards the middle of the bay in search of water that is 10 to 20 feet deep. Fish small jigs tipped with maggots for yellow and white perch or minnows under tip-ups for northern pike, chain pickerel, and largemouth bass.

Vermont Fish & Wildlife Grants Available to Improve Shooting Ranges

VERMONT FISH & WILDLIFE - Press Release



Vermont Fish & Wildlife is offering shooting range improvement grants to encourage upgrades of shooting ranges for enhanced safety and operation.

VTF&W photo

Vermont Fish and Wildlife is offering shooting range improvement grants to encourage upgrades of shooting ranges for enhanced safety and operation.

The Shooting Range Improvement Grant Program seeks grant applications from clubs and government agencies involved in the operation of shooting ranges, including archery ranges. Grant applications must be received by 4:30 p.m. on February 28, 2023.

Eligible projects include shooting range re-development, noise abatement structures, safety berms, shooting pads and stations, and the construction or improvement of access roads and parking lots. Grant money may also be used for lead mitigation, such as recycling, reducing range floor surface drainage, or liming range property.

\$60,000 in grant funds will be available this year. These funds are derived through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Wildlife Restoration Program which is based on federal excise taxes on hunting and shooting equipment.

Ranges that receive these grants must provide at least 20 hours of public use per month when in operation and be open at reasonable times for hunter education courses.

For further information or to download an [application packet](#), visit the [Vermont Fish and Wildlife website](#). Click on “Hunt” and then on “Shooting Ranges in Vermont.” Or, contact Nicole Meier at nicole.meier@vermont.gov or by calling (802) 802-318-1347.

Hammond Cove & West Mountain Shooting Ranges Closing for the Winter

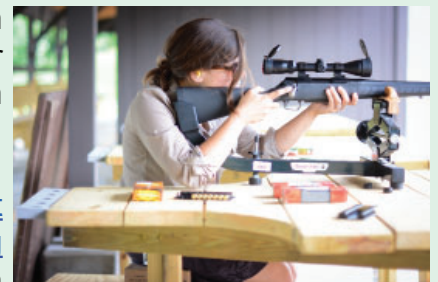
VERMONT FISH & WILDLIFE - Press Release

The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department says its Hammond Cove public shooting range in Hartland will close December 12, and the West Mountain Wildlife Management Area public shooting range will close December 14.

“We want to thank all of the people who have supported the operation of the two ranges in Windsor and Essex Counties which are essential to hunter skill development and the safe use of firearms,” said Alison Thomas, Vermont Fish and Wildlife’s direc-

tor of outreach. “Both ranges will close for the winter and reopen next spring.”

[Information about Vermont shooting ranges](#) is available on Vermont Fish and Wildlife’s website www.vtfishand-wildlife.com.



Treating Invasive Plants Workshop for Consulting Foresters

VERMONT FISH & WILDLIFE - Press Release

The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department and the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets will host a workshop for consulting foresters to learn about treating invasive plants with cost-share funding on Thursday, February 16, from 12:30 to 3:30 p.m. If there is bad weather, the workshop will be held on March 9.

Invasive plants, such as honeysuckle and buckthorn, can impact the ability of private landowners to manage their woodlands, can severely hinder the success of timber harvests and can be expensive to treat.

Cost-share programs, such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), can help by providing funding to treat invasive plants on private property.

This workshop will help consulting foresters learn how to move through the EQIP application process and plan successful invasive plant treatments in order to get good results for their clients.

Topics to be covered during the workshop include:

- NRCS standards, practices, payment rates, and treatment options
- How to plan a successful treatment with NRCS
- Worker Protection Standards with the VT Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets
- An update and discussion on glyphosate and other commonly used herbicides
- An open panel discus-

sion with experienced contractors (will also include experience with poison parsnip and phragmites)

- The importance of controlling invasive plants to benefit wildlife habitat and forest health

The workshop will be held at the Canadian Club at 414 E Montpelier Road in Barre. Attendees will receive 3 Vermont pesticide recertification credits and 2.5 SAF Category 1 CFE credits for attending.

To view the agenda and register for the workshop, visit tinyurl.com/36fk6747.

Please send questions to Habitat Biologist Andrea Shortsleeve at andrea.shortsleeve@vermont.gov or 802-477-2257. Registration is free, but space is limited. Registrants will be notified if bad weather causes postponement.



Shifting Baselines

by Brad Roy

Happy New Year! It seems to me that with each passing year, the act of logging on to renew my lifetime hunting and fishing license always gets my brain churning about the outdoor adventures the new year might bring. Often times, this daydreaming involves plans to scout more, spend more time and energy in the woods, and work hard to have a better season than I did the year before. This January though, with the renewal of my license brings a reflection on my own shifting baseline of what my relationship with the outdoors will look like this year, and for many years to come.

The idea of "Shifting Baselines" is a principal I first learned about while working on my Fisheries and Wildlife Biology degree. Simply put, it is a type of change to how a system is measured, usually against previous reference points (baselines), which themselves may represent significant changes from an even earlier state of the system. What this means in reality is that as things change over time, the amount of change is very relative to the observer. Take, for example, populations of game animals from the early days of this country until now. When Europeans first began hunting and fishing the land we now know as the USA, game was abundant to say the least. Things like buffalo, deer, passenger pigeon, and many others existed in untold numbers. Flocks of birds so large the sky grew dark when they passed



over were the baseline at that time.

As overhunting and lack of recognition of the importance of preserving habitat began to take its toll, each generation grew up with a baseline of fewer and fewer animals. The

flocks of birds began to no longer darken the sky, but because folks hadn't known any different in their lifetime, these significantly lower populations were considered normal. With time and overharvest clicking along, suddenly popula-



tions of passenger pigeons for example became all but non-existent. In this time, having practically no animals on the landscape was considered normal, hence shifting the baseline of normality to something drastically different than it was just a few generations prior.

While the premise of shifting baselines is typically used in a generational time scale, I believe the same thing happens to us as individuals over the course of our lives as well. Change is often difficult to deal with at first, but it usually doesn't take long to become so comfortable with changes in our lives that we suddenly prefer the new normal to the way it was before. For me, this relates to the outdoors and growing older in a strong way. Over close to three decades, my relationship to the outdoors has changed and evolved from a fun place to play after school, to a world of complex hunting and fishing challenges that I have worked to overcome. My passion for finding a better stand location, catching a larger Northern Pike, or finally discovering my first fisher in a well-made cubby set are all examples of what drove me to spend more and more time in the outdoors. This season, however, my baseline took a major shift from trying to be the best sportsman I can, to trying to pass my love and passion for the outdoors down to my newborn son.

We were blessed with a happy, healthy baby boy in September of 2022, and although the elation of bringing a new baby home was there, knowing just how different my outdoor adventures would become weighed heavily on my mind. Here I was, with a baby just a few weeks old right as the leaves were beginning to drop and hunting and trapping seasons were beginning to open! As any parent knows, surviving the first few months is no easy task, and although my time afield was cut down significantly, I quickly came to the realization that my new biggest outdoor pursuit would not be chasing the biggest buck, but rather trying to pass on all the joy and wonder that comes along with a life spent outdoors to my son.

Despite crying, wet diapers, bottle breaks, and the inherent slowed pace that comes along with any activity that carries a newborn in-tow, my outdoor satisfaction only seems to grow with every opportunity I take to get my little guy outside into the woods. At just a few weeks of age, he accompanied my wife and I on a day trip to hunting camp to work on prep-

ping my tree stand for the season. He may have slept the whole time, but knowing he breathed fresh air all day was worth the extra baggage and slowed pace. Come December, our son now around two months old, out came the front carrier to haul him into the woods to set fisher traps. Learning how to operate on the trapline with a 13-pound baby strapped to my chest certainly wasn't easy, but knowing I am already beginning to pass along something that has been so meaningful to me down to my son from the very earliest days of his life is more fulfilling than any buck or fish I might every be fortunate enough to harvest.

My new baseline has certainly shifted, but rather than move in a negative direction like the term is often associated with, I will happily adapt to this new, slower pace of outdoor adventures. For now, we get to simply carry our little guy along for the fresh air, but as time goes on, I look forward to this new, slower pace turning into frequent outings full of opportunities to study bugs, squeeze puffy mushrooms, and help myself re-discover the outdoors through a child's eyes.

Landis Menard of Fairfield, VT Wins Vermont's Lifetime

Hunting and Fishing License Lottery

VERMONT FISH & WILDLIFE - Press Release

Landis Menard, 25, of Fairfield, VT is the lucky winner of the 2022 Vermont Lifetime Hunting and Fishing License Lottery.

Mr. Menard will be entitled to hunt and fish in Vermont for free for the rest of his life. He was drawn as the winner from among 18,782 Lifetime License Lottery tickets purchased in 2022. The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department holds the drawing annually.

"The Lifetime License Lottery gives anyone, resident or nonresident, an opportunity to win a Vermont hunting and fishing license that is valid for the recipient's lifetime," said Fish and Wildlife Commissioner Christopher Herrick. "Even if you don't win the license, by applying, you know you have contributed to fish and wildlife conservation in Vermont."

This year's sales of the \$2.00 tickets brought net sales of \$37,445 to the Vermont Fish and Wildlife

Department. These state dollars can be leveraged with federal funds to produce more than \$149,000 to support the department's mission to conserve fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats.

"These funds help us to manage the state's sportfish and game animals, protect threatened and endangered species and conserve important habitat for wildlife," said Herrick.

A person can enter Vermont's License of a Lifetime Lottery by adding the \$2.00 entry fee when they buy their license on the Fish and Wildlife Department website at vtfishandwildlife.com. They can also enter by applying at statewide wherever Vermont hunting, fishing and trapping licenses are sold, or with a printable application available on the department website. There is no limit on the number of times a person may enter during the year.

Trap Talk

by Randy Barrows

Last Tuesday evening I took a ride to South Royalton, Vermont, a nice nearly two-hour cruise. On my way down a thousand things were going through my mind as always. I had a million other things I could have been doing. But trapping in Vermont is near and dear to me and there was a meeting going on about new laws that could affect us all greatly.

On the table was a document called the Draft of Potential Recommendations Related to Trapping Best Management Practices have a different name for it but ahhh forget it.

This draft was the result of four working group meetings with all the stake holders in the room. Those folks consisted of the Vermont Trappers Association, Protect our Wildlife, Humane Society of the United States and the Vermont Wildlife Coalition.

Upon arrival I saw a large gathering of Fish and Wildlife officials and a very large gathering of Vermont outdoorsmen. It was explained that we would hear a presentation from AFWA and then break into groups and talk about the issues. It should also be noted that no one from the animal rights groups were present, nor the group of six legislators drew up Act 159.

The AFWA gave a excellent detailed presentation covering what has been done to date reference Best Management Practices (BMP). There studies have been done on 23 species of animals, with 91% showing no injuries. They also did a large poll across the U S and found that 71 % of folks favor trapping. 15 % do not. We also learned that 16 species have been actually tested in Vermont-by-Vermont trappers in the last ten years.

ISSUE 1:

To improve trapping and trapping systems for animal welfare, selectivity, and safety in accordance with the findings of AFWA decades of research.

POW/HSUS/VWC proposal, no opposition to the VtA proposal but there was disagreement over whether it would be enforceable or beneficial to animal welfare. These groups still see serious deficiencies in the proven BMP process.

VTA proposal; The items described in the department proposal were originally put forth in a petition to the board by this group and were done so according to AFWA s recommendations

Department proposal;

- All base plates must feature a center mount chain with swivel and free moving chains that allow mobility for animals caught.
- All traps must have adjustable pan tension
- Traps must be anchored with a minimum of 12 inches of chain with a maximum of 18 inches.
- Foothold traps must be padded or offset, laminated, or have jaws with a minimum thickness of 5/16ths of a inch.
- No foothold trap shall be set on land with a spread of more than 6 ¼ inches,.
- These recommendations basically make every trap I currently own non useable.

ISSUE 2:

Baits and lures, to minimize the take of non-target animals.

POW/HSUS/WVC proposal: Prohibit baiting a trap if the bait is visible from the air with the goal of limiting the takes of birds that are protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty act.

VTA Proposal; Meat based baits should be covered at the time the trap is set

Department proposal: Meat based bait used in trapping should be covered at the time the trap is set. Coverings shall include but not limited to brush, branches, leaves soil. Snow, water, or enclosures constructed of wood, metal, wire, plastic, or natural materials.



ISSUE 3:

Body grip traps; To minimize the potential for the capture of domestic pets in body gripping traps set on land. The department submits this is relatively a uncommon occurrence.

POW/HSUS/VCW; Prohibit the use of body grip traps on land. Traps in water should be fully submerged. Prohibit the drowning of animals in submerged sets and require reporting of incidental takes, which is already required. A non-target animal is a furbearer taken out of season or a non-furbearer animal taken in a trap.

VTA proposal: no meat based baited body grip traps be set on the ground. Legalize BMP certified cable restraints in the state of Vermont with prior VFWD certification for users (Currently prohibited in Vermont).

Department proposal; no meat based baited body grip traps shall be set on the ground. However, baited bodygrip traps with a jaw spread of 60 inches (2) up to and including size 220 bodygrip can be used if placed at least 5 feet above the ground or placed in a enclosure no greater than 60in(2) and with a trap trigger that is recessed 12 inches from all openings, Note; Body gripping traps of any size set in the water are legal regardless of whether they are baited or not.

Fundamentals for Safe and Enjoyable Ice Fishing

VERMONT FISH & WILDLIFE - Press Release



With the start of the new year, many Vermonters are preparing for one of the state's most popular winter pastimes: ice fishing.

"If you're looking for a fun, easy way to get outdoors with friends and family this winter, ice fishing is hard to top," said Fisheries Biologist Shawn Good. "It's quick to learn, affordable and generally more accessible and social than open water fishing."

In light of Vermont's recent warm weather, the department stresses that anglers take ice safety seriously and recommends a few basic tips and precautions.

"A minimum of three to four inches of clear black ice is safe to walk on," advised Good. "If you're unsure about ice thickness in your area call your local bait and tackle shop. You can also look for other people out fishing. Experienced anglers know how to read the ice, so if you're unsure, go where others are or have

been."

It is important to know that ice thickness is not always uniform. Areas around pressure cracks or near stream or river inlets can be thinner and weaker than surrounding ice. Good advises anglers to carry a set of ice picks and a spud bar, head out with a partner, and to let someone know where you will be fishing and when you plan on returning home.

For those just starting out, a hand-auger for cutting holes in the ice is the most expensive piece of equipment needed. These can be found at hardware or outdoors stores, or online, for under \$50. A scoop for clearing and keeping holes from freezing over, short ice fishing rods or tip-ups, and hooks, weights, lures and baits are the other essentials. Safety gear including micro-spikes for traction and a spud bar for testing ice thickness, and sturdy waterproof boots and plenty of layers to keep warm, are also recommended.

No matter where you are in Vermont, an ice fishing opportunity is close by. And a successful ice fishing trip do not have end when the fish stop biting.

"After a fun day on the ice, anglers can also enjoy a healthy meal of tasty, locally caught fish," said Good. "You can find recipes from our Vermont Wild Kitchen partnership for everything from trout to crappie to smelt on the department's YouTube channel."

To learn more about ice fishing safety, tips for beginners, and places to fish visit Vermont Fish and Wildlife's "[Ice Fishing Basics](#)" and "[Ice Fishing Opportunities](#)" webpages.

WRITERS WANTED



Have you always wanted to write for an outdoor publication? Now is your chance.

Contact
vermontsportingjournal@gmail.com

Watershed Grant Program Now Accepting Applications

VERMONT FISH & WILDLIFE - Press Release

The 2023 Vermont Watershed Grants Program is now accepting applications for projects that protect, restore and enhance the state's lakes, streams, rivers, and ponds, including Vermonters' ability to understand and enjoy these treasures. Applications are due no later than Wednesday February 8, 2023.



Vermont Fish & Wildlife photo

Program grants are available to municipalities, local and regional government agencies, sporting clubs, non-profit organizations, and water-related citizen groups. Projects that seek to directly protect or restore fish and aquatic wildlife habitat are strongly encouraged. Examples of past funded projects include streamside vegetation restoration the removal of old dams and replacement of culverts to improve fish passage.

For 2023, \$70,000 is available to fund three categories of projects. The three categories and the maximum amount for each project type are: education and outreach (\$5,000), planning, assessment, inventory, monitoring (\$3,500) and on-the-ground implementation (\$10,000).

The Vermont Watershed Grants Program is a joint project of the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department and the Department of Environmental Conservation. It was established by legislature and funded by sales of the [Vermont Conservation License Plate](#).

“When Vermonters purchase a Conservation License Plate, they’re helping protect healthy streams and lakes as well as conserving wildlife and important habitats for future generations,” said Fish and Wildlife Commissioner Christopher Herrick. “Proceeds from the sale of Conservation License Plates fund the Watershed Grants program and help support the Fish and Wildlife Department’s Nongame Wildlife Fund.”

The Watershed Grants application guide and application forms are available on the web at: <https://vt-fishandwildlife.com/get-involved/apply-for-a-grant/watershed-grant> Please note that the application location has changed from past years.

Information to obtain the Vermont Conservation License Plate is available on the Department of Motor Vehicles website: <https://dmv.vermont.gov/registrations/license-plates/specialty-plates#conservation>



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December is the Start of Bird Feeding Season

VERMONT FISH & WILDLIFE - Press Release

The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department recommends Vermonters wait to put up bird feeders until December 1 to avoid attracting bears.

“Winter bird feeding is a good way to attract birds arriving from Canada, including evening grosbeaks and purple finches, as well as resident birds including northern cardinals and black-capped chickadees,” said Doug Morin, Vermont Fish and Wildlife’s bird project leader. “Black oil sunflower is a good seed choice that will attract a variety of birds. Adding other seeds or suet can help to attract certain species. Thistle, for example, attracts many of the finches. Gardeners will find leaving late-blooming flowers uncut provides seeds which can also attract birds.”

While watching your bird feeders, you can participate in one or more bird monitoring projects by looking up the Audubon Christmas Bird Count, the Great Backyard Bird Count and Project Feeder Watch -- all three collect important information for understanding bird populations.

The Fish and Wildlife Department offers these tips for bird-friendly bird feeding:

- Keep cats inside. Domestic cats are the leading cause of bird death in North America, and feeders can make birds particularly easy prey.

- Place feeders closer than 4 feet or farther than 10 feet from a window. Being close to, or far from, a window may reduce bird collisions.
- Clean feeders regularly. To eliminate harmful bacteria and viruses, feeders should be washed every few weeks with a 10 percent bleach solution, then rinsed and allowed to dry before refilling.

- Feed birds only between December 1 and April 1 but remove feeders if you see signs of bears. Most bears should be in dens during this time, but some delay entering their dens while even those that have dened may re-emerge to feed if there is a period of warm weather. Bears that learn to get food from people will continue to do so, potentially leading to property damage and dangerous encounters with people which can result in the bear’s demise.



Bird feeders offer an easy and safe way to interact with wildlife but installing them after December 1 limits the potential to attract bears.

VTF&W photo by John Hall

Feeding birds, even in the winter, runs the risk of attracting bears. During winter thaws some bears will occasionally take advantage of the mild weather and leave their den in search of food. If a bear visits your bird feeder or the feeder of someone in your community, it is important to take down your feeder for a week. If the bear can’t find easy food it will quickly return to its winter den.

What a Difference A Year Can Make

By Brett Ladeau

Around this time last year, I was complaining about my lack of luck during the 2021 deer season. Well, what a difference a year can make. While I didn't have my best year ever, I did still manage to put 4 deer in the freezer this fall. As I write this, I may still have time to add one or two more, as I have late season tags in New York and Massachusetts still in my pocket.

Since I started deer hunting in 1980, I think there have only been a few years where I didn't get any deer at all, and last year was one of them. I have never been super selective and usually take the opportunities as the present themselves. Some years it feels like I cannot do anything wrong and other years I cannot do anything right. Last year I couldn't do anything right, and this year I did enough right to fill two Vermont archery tags, a muzzleloader tag in New Hampshire, and a doe tag in Pennsylvania during their rifle season. My love of hunting is unwavering but to be honest deer hunting hasn't really been my priority for a few years. I still like to go but with limited deer sightings the past several years my motivation has dwindled. I think there are many reasons, and one being that I am not putting the time in like I used to. People that routinely are good at anything spend most of their time preparing and working hard to put

themselves in the right position. The old saying that hard work pays off is especially true in deer hunting. You can get lucky now and then but they people that routinely fill their tags are putting the extra effort in. As my hunting priorities have switched, I tend to put most of my effort into spring and fall turkey hunting and my deer hunting has suffered a little from that. The time spent in the woods can improve your luck with all sorts of game but if you are not really studying the deer/other game in your hunting areas than you are probably not really giving yourself the best opportunity of success. I think last year I spent a few days out and I am sure I hunted enough to get a deer on most years, but I didn't really put the same effort in as in years past.

This year I decided to try to take my deer hunting a little more seriously and spent more time getting prepared. With lack of food in most of the places I hunted this fall that meant deer were on the move more. I am not sure if my extra preparation put me in the right place or if I just had a few lucky guesses where to sit. I knew deer were hitting fields and greenery more this year, so I did concentrate my efforts around or near field edges. I got my first Vermont archery doe in the timber as she was headed to a nearby field. My New Hampshire deer came into a secluded field well



before dark and I was able to capitalize on the opportunity. I shot my Vermont 8 point as it was feeding along an old grassy snowmobile trail. My Pennsylvania doe was wondering the opposite side of a big swamp but was feeding on the greenery along the edge as well. Some years with limited food you can put yourself in the right spot if you can figure out what they are eating. Other years with an abundance of food, makes it harder as deer don't need to travel as far to find a spot to eat and picking the right spot becomes more difficult.

In addition to a good deer season, I had a lot of fun and success fall turkey hunting too. My luck started on a beautiful fall gobbler in New Hampshire. I was able to complete a delayed double with my good friend TJ on two nice toms in New York a few days later. The following weekend my daughter, Sydney, and I doubled on two mature toms in Vermont on another delayed double. On our delayed doubles I was able to call in a flock of 7 toms in New York and while we were both supposed to shoot on the count of 3 but I didn't have a good shot, so I waited and was lucky that one of the others hung out long enough for me to shoot. The results were very simi-



lar in Vermont, minus the 3 count. I let Sydney shoot and one of the other toms hung out long enough for me to get one too. I was able to help a good friend check Vermont off his 49-state quest with another fine longbeard. I took my daughter's boyfriend on his first hunt of any kind, and we were fortunate to find a flock of turkey's that were willing to play the game and he was able to fill his fall tag too.

In addition, my grandson went hunting and my son even got back into it this fall. My son missed a beauty of a buck on the last day of rifle season but between you and me I was just happy to see him show interest in hunting again. He usually joins me on a turkey hunt in the spring but hadn't really been into deer hunting all that much. It did my heart good to see some of my kids and grandkids show an interest in hunting this fall. I was thinking I might be the end of the line in my family, but it seems like there continues to be interest. The future looks brighter than I thought it did. My entire disposition regarding deer hunting and hunting continuing in the family sure looks a lot different this year than it did a year ago. Indeed, what a difference a year can make.



Vermont's Free Ice Fishing Day is January 28

Ice Fishing Festival to be Held at Silver Lake State Park in Celebration

VERMONT FISH & WILDLIFE - Press Release

Vermont's state-wide Free Ice Fishing Day is Saturday, January 28, 2023.

Free Ice Fishing Day is held annually on the last Saturday in January. The day is geared toward giving new ice anglers an opportunity to try ice fishing before purchasing equipment, but any angler may ice fish on any waterbody open to ice fishing state-wide without a fishing license on Free Ice Fishing Day.

To celebrate, the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department is holding an Ice Fishing Festival at Silver Lake State Park in Barnard—its first since the start of the pandemic. The festival will be held from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. The event is free and open to all ages as well as families with kids.

"The Ice Fishing Festival typically draws between 500-700 participants for a day of fishing, skill-building, and community," said Education Specialist Corey Hart. "Everyone at the department is excited to be bringing this favorite winter celebration back after a two-year hiatus."

Vermont Fish and Wildlife staff, as well as instructors from Vermont's Let's Go Fishing Program, will be on-hand to teach ice fishing skills. These include knot tying, baiting and using an ice fishing rod, and most importantly,



how to stay safe on the ice. They will also discuss fishing regulations and fish identification.

Fish and Wildlife staff will operate a fish fry station to cook up participants' catch, and there will be plenty of cocoa on hand. Participants are encouraged to dress appropriately for the weather, and ice cleats are strongly recommended.

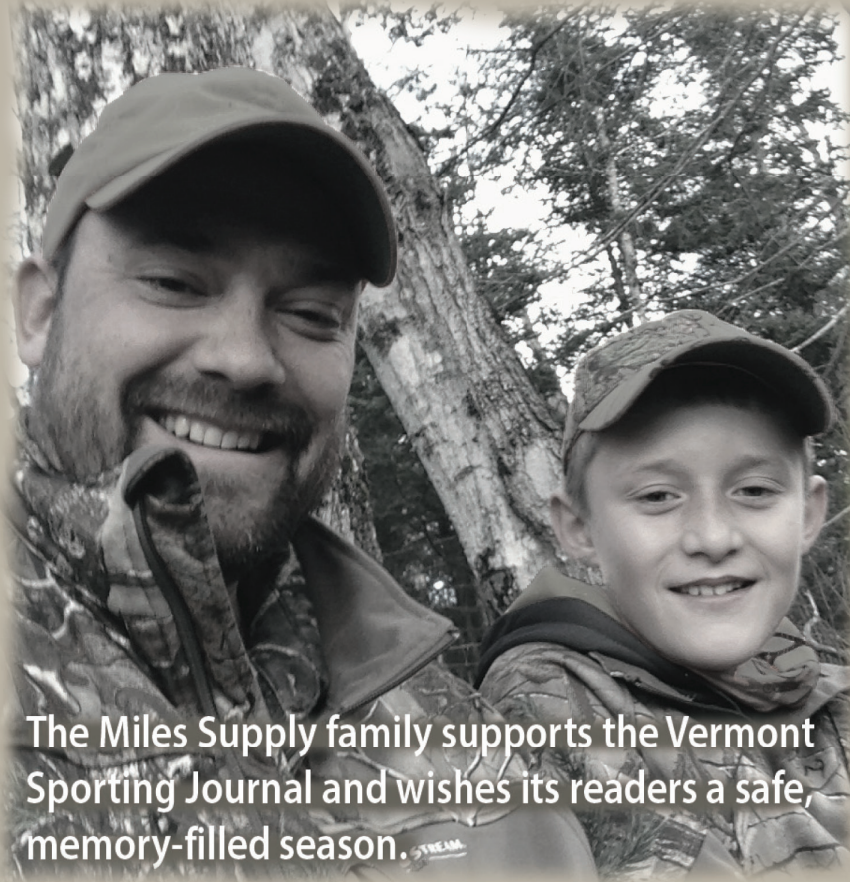
"Ice fishing is one of the most accessible forms of fishing and can be a great way to introduce people to how much fun fishing can be," said Fish and Wildlife Commissioner Christopher Herrick. "This festival will demonstrate that ice fishing isn't just about catching fish. It's also a great way to spend some time outdoors with friends and family. You can skate, sled, make a snow fort, and have a cook-out – all while waiting for the flags on your tip-ups to signal when you've caught a fish."

Fishing equipment will be loaned for this fun day on the ice, or participants may bring their own. For more information, visit the Vermont Fish and Wildlife website. Registration can be completed online in advance at <https://www.register-ed.com/events/view/189542> or people may register when they arrive, although registering in advance will enable participants to get on the ice faster.

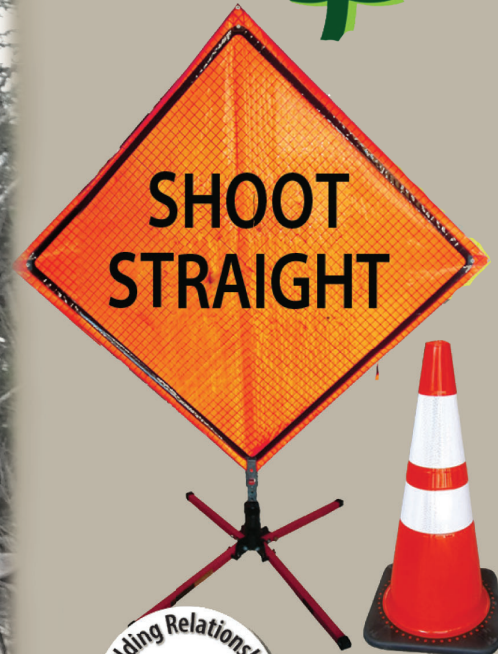


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DOUBLING UP

by Ken Jones

Opening day of Vermont rifle deer season is a special day for thousands of Vermont sportsmen as the anticipation is finally over and they get to pursue the number one game animal on the planet.

Back in 2011 my son and older brother headed out early to our usual area. We stopped for brother Rick to get something at a store that happened to be open early enough. While Adam and I waited I joked to him that my goal was to get blood all over Rick's brand-new truck.

It was an unusually warm day for mid-November with Temps expected to reach the 60-degree mark. I split off from them as I had scouted an area not as deep in as they were going. We wished each other good luck and off we went.

Although it was warm, it was the rut and deer will be deer. As I approached my spot and began climbing in my summit climber, I didn't get all the way up and I had deer running through in the dark. Could this be a good sign of things to come??

As the morning wore on the sun came up along with the Temps. Of course, no matter what the temperature you have to wear your Johnson woollens or your just not a Vermont deer hunter. As I sat there cooking, my eyes got heavy, and the nods became more and more frequent. Squirrel noise was at about six thousand decibels in the dry November leaves.

A little after 8am one of those squirrels got me to open my eyes and to my surprise I opened them and saw legs coming through

very close. I slid the safety off on my Remington 700ml in 50 calibers. Soon the entire deer came into view, and it was a nice little high raked buck. As he walked in front of the stand in bow range, I got him in the scope and gave him a soft natural voice grunt to stop him. On cue, he put the brakes on and I sent the Hornaday XTP right into the pocket and he scrambled off. Seemed like brother Rick had my number in his cell already to send because my phone started vibrating before the smoke even cleared!!!

I told him it was close, and I felt good but to stay put until I got down and figured things out. Well, he never was good at taking directions so before I even got down the tree, he came sneaking up to my position. Cursing him I exclaimed, "stop where you are, he went right there, and I don't want you messing up any sign!!" At that moment he looked down and said "oh yeah I got blood right here!!" The trail was easy to follow and short and mister oblivious had walked right passed the nice 5 pointer I had dispatched.

As we stood over him a shot rang out from down the ridge, and I exclaimed "that sounds like Adam" then a second shot from the same spot rang out and I instructed Rick to go see how he made out. I would take care of my deer.



The author with his 22 NY buck.

After field dressing and tagging my buck, I got a call from Rick. Adam had gotten a nice little 4 pointer!!!

Adam told the story of his morning and he'd had action right from daylight. Seems he'd had two other bucks chasing does by him so fast he couldn't get shots, but this guy was cruising by himself and gave him a nice little chip shot.

His follow up was errant and not needed anyway. His trail was also easy to follow and short. Took us a little while to get both deer in the truck but, we had succeeded in dirtying up the new truck!!!

This was one of many great days I'd shared with my boy. Unfortunately, those days are gone. I lost my son this past November to heart complications at the age of 38. On the day of his death, I had to be where I could try and wrap my head around what had happened and why the lord took my boy so soon. Apparently, he had a need for Big A as we called him. That afternoon he sent a big mature doe that I'd been playing chess within New York for a week. I sent a crossbow bolt at her and Adam guided it right home.

Of all the bucks I'd taken I never really got to have one chasing does to me. They'd all been lone cruisers. Two weeks after my crossbow doe on opening morning of New York 2022 rifle opener, I had three does come in looking intently behind them. When I saw the fourth deer coming, they busted out and there he was. A nice little fat 4 pointer looking like a bird dog bumping those does along. Finally, a buck chasing right to me. Those last two deer of 22 were definitely sent by my angel. My boy.



The author and his son with their double

I took that 4 pointer with the .280 that Adam always hunted with. It will now probably spend the rest of it's life in the gun safe. Only hunting on the other side with Big A.

In loving memory of my son Adam R Jones
9/28/84-11/13/22 RIP my boy.

Hammond Cove & West Mountain Shooting Ranges Closing for the Winter

VERMONT FISH & WILDLIFE - Press Release

The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department says its Hammond Cove public shooting range in Hartland will close December 12, and the West Mountain Wildlife Management Area public shooting range will close December 14.

"We want to thank all of the people who have supported the operation of the two ranges in Windsor and Essex Counties which are essential to hunter skill development and the safe use of firearms," said Alison Thomas, Vermont Fish and Wild-

life's director of outreach. "Both ranges will close for the winter and reopen next spring."

[Information about Vermont shooting ranges](http://www.vtfishandwildlife.com) is available on Vermont Fish and Wildlife's website www.vtfishandwildlife.com.



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