

**Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department**  
**Transition Document**

**I. Department Overview**

The mission of the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife is the conservation of fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the people of Vermont.

The fish, wildlife, and plant resources of Vermont are a tremendous asset to the state, which contributes to the State's high quality of life. A 2015 survey conducted by Responsive Management identified that 98% of Vermonters find it very important that native fish and wildlife populations are healthy even if they never view these species. The Department is responsible for the conservation of wildlife in its broadest sense: 40 species of reptiles and amphibians, 91 species of fish, 252 species of birds, 58 species of mammals, more than 15,000 insect species, along with important wildlife habitats for present and future generations of Vermonters. To that end, native wildlife such as the beaver, moose, fisher, wild turkey, common loon, bald eagle, osprey, and peregrine falcon have been successfully restored through Department efforts. The Fish and Wildlife Department has conserved and manages over 135,000 acres of land for public use and as important habitat. In addition, the Department provides safe, high quality hunting, fishing, trapping, and wildlife viewing opportunities. Vermont currently ranks 2nd in the nation in participation in wildlife associated recreation (combination of hunting, fishing, and wildlife watching) with 62% of Vermonters participating. These activities generate significant revenues for the state. In 2011, Vermonters and visitors spent an estimated \$744 million dollars on fishing, hunting, and wildlife viewing activities.

The core services provided by the Department include conserving, restoring and enhancing fish and wildlife habitat, wetlands and natural communities through acquisition, regulation, and technical assistance to private landowners and municipalities; inventorying, monitoring and managing game species to ensure sustainable population levels are maintained; inventorying, monitoring, and managing non-game species and developing recovery initiatives for species that are threatened or endangered; promoting and providing a diversity of hunting and angling opportunities; promoting and facilitating land management planning and stewardship in Vermont; managing wildlife habitat on 89 Wildlife Management Areas, maintaining public access to water bodies on over 170 Access Areas, providing wildlife-based recreation opportunities; ensuring safe practices for those

participating in fish and wildlife based recreational activities; maintaining full fish and wildlife response capabilities for citizens and agencies regarding threats to human life or safety; limiting the number of human injuries and fatalities that result from encounters with wildlife (i.e. moose and deer car collisions); ensuring the enforcement of fish and wildlife laws; informing and educating the public; and performing mission critical research.

The Department is organized into five divisions: administration, wildlife, fisheries, law enforcement, and outreach. The Administration Division provides policy, legal, planning, personnel, and financial management for the Department. The division is responsible for the Department's \$23-million-dollar annual budget, \$7 to \$10 million in federal grant dollars, and promulgating rules and regulations. It also oversees the production, distribution, and sales of all hunting and fishing licenses and over fifteen types of other permits related to resource protection.

The Wildlife Division provides the science and action to protect and manage all wildlife, plants, and their habitats throughout Vermont. Division staff work on three main areas – management of hunted and trapped species; public and private lands habitat conservation; and protecting rare, threatened, and endangered species. Division staff are engaged in a variety of activities such as: conducting research in support of management actions and decisions; monitoring and restoring populations of rare, threatened and endangered plant and animal species; preparing harvest recommendations for wildlife species with open regulated hunting or trapping seasons; participating in the protection of critical wildlife habitat through regulatory processes such as Act 250; land acquisition and management of 135,000 acres on the Department's Wildlife Management Areas, monitoring wildlife diseases and the importation of wildlife into Vermont; and , technical assistance, planning and outreach to wildlife observers, landowners, municipalities, partner organizations, hunters, school children, and natural resources professionals regarding wildlife in Vermont.

The Fisheries Division is composed of the Fish Management Section, the Fish Culture Section, and the fishing access area program. The Fish Management Section conserves and restores fish and fish habitats in Vermont, while the Fish Culture Section stocks approximately 2 million fish annually in public waters for recreation angling and fish restoration. The economic impact of sport fishing in Vermont was estimated to be \$147.1 million in retail sales, providing 2,420 jobs and \$16.0 million in state and local tax revenues. The division is responsible for the conservation and management of all fish and aquatic habitats throughout Vermont. Staff members are engaged in a wide variety of activities, including: monitoring populations of sport fish species, endangered species, and their

habitats; cooperating in the research, management, and restoration of fish communities across the state; operating five state fish hatcheries that rear and stock trout, salmon, and walleye annually for recreational and restoration purposes; maintaining more than 180 developed fishing access areas, and a variety of riparian lands that provide public access to waters of the state; monitoring fish health; regulating fish importation; preventing the spread of aquatic nuisance species; controlling sea lamprey in Lake Champlain; evaluating current and preparing new fishing harvest regulation recommendations for a variety of species; participating in the protection of aquatic species and critical aquatic habitat through regulatory processes, providing technical assistance; and preparing educational materials.

The Law Enforcement Division's primary duty is to enforce Vermont's fish and wildlife laws and regulations. Fish and wildlife species are held in the Public Trust and this division enforces laws related to the protection of these resources for the benefit of all Vermonters. The division monitors more than 150,000 license hunters, anglers, and trappers and responds to approximately 9,000 complaints a year involving fish and wildlife violations and public service requests. These include human/wildlife conflicts, animal damage intervention, removal of big game animals from roadsides, and rabid animal response. The division plays a critical support role to other divisions by assisting with hunter education and conservation camp education, fish stocking, and biological data collection. The division also perform duties outside of conservation such as search and rescue operations, assistance to other law enforcement agencies, and boating, snowmobile, and ATV operation enforcement.

The Outreach Division provides quality information and education about Vermont's fish and wildlife, facilitating the public's greater understanding and safe enjoyment of these resources. The division is responsible for the Department's informational and formal educational. Programs are designed to improve the public's knowledge and appreciation of Vermont's fish and wildlife resources and their habitats as well as related laws, disease issues and management programs. This is accomplished by communicating with the public through news releases, PSAs, Facebook, the Department website, and "Wildlife Watch" on WCAX. These efforts are a means to create awareness and achieve voluntary compliance with state laws, regulations and programs and encourage support for fish, wildlife and habitat conservation and protection programs. The division manages Vermont's conservation camps that provide conservation education to 900 children per year, certifies 5,000

Vermonters a year through hunter education courses, and teaches 6,000 students to fish through the Let's Go Fishing Program.

## **II. Department Major and Evolving Issues**

### **a) Angler & Hunter demographics.**

As in states across the country we are seeing a slow but steady decline in participation by hunters. The peak, in the mid-1970's, was more than 150,000 hunting licenses (combination and hunting only). The current number is over 60,000 licenses. Although fishing licenses have also decreased from the peak of more than 160,000, the decline has not been as pronounced, and has been more nearly flat in recent years. Several things are important to note. The first is that this is against a state population of only 630,000 people. The second is that much of this decline in hunting licenses is not due to a failure to recruit, but due to the aging population of the state. Third, Vermont still has the second highest rate of participation per capita in wildlife based recreation (hunting, fishing, trapping, bird and wildlife viewing) in the country, after Alaska. These activities represent more than \$740 million in direct economic impact. Finally, because of gradual, inflationary increases in license costs revenue has grown even with a declining participation rate among hunters and without the dramatic decline in participation seen when more drastic increases in license costs were implemented in the past. However, the future relevancy of the Department, will depend on our ability to expand the support of the general public for our mission while continuing to retain and recruit our traditional constituents.

### **b) Changing expectations of the public (regulatory work, changing attitudes, etc.).**

Despite its size, the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department is extraordinarily modern, progressive and innovative when compared to similar agencies around the country. From instituting stringent bait fish rules and banning (with the Board) natural deer lure to reduce the risk of disease, to leading the way on developing a comprehensive Wildlife Action Plan, to investing in The Vermont Conservation Design mapping and evaluation effort, to its emphasis on non-game and endangered species work, to providing technical assistance to other state agencies and towns interested in conservation of wildlife, the Department has been ahead of the curve. However, this has resulted in an ever increasing burden on a limited staff and budget. For instance, the Department does well over a half million dollars a year of regulatory work, the vast majority of which is paid for by hunters and anglers. While the increase in General Fund support in recent years is a welcome recognition that much of the Department's work is not

focused on game species and license holders, the gap between expectations of the general public and financial support for the Department's mission remains very real.

c) Evolving anti-hunting and anti-trapping movement.

Vermont has in the last two years seen an unprecedented growth in opponents of trapping and some forms of hunting. Although public support for the Department's work (as demonstrated by the Department commissioned study by Responsive Management) is remarkably high, even when that work will result in decreased development, the growth of this anti-trapping and anti-hunting movement poses a real threat to the Department's public capital and reputation. The essential question posed is whether the individual rights of animals should trump (or be a factor) in deciding what management techniques and recreational activities should be allowed. This is likely to be an ongoing question and struggle, both in the Legislature (where opponents will try to ban trapping and hunting techniques one at a time) and at the Board (where they will try to ban those activities in a roundabout way by preventing rules from being enacted which allow the implementation of legal activities). The Department's science is solid, and will be bolstered by the planned hiring of a statistician/scientist, but the weakness will lie in the emotional appeal to end practices that are alleged to cause suffering. Add to this a growing urbanization of the state, an increasing prevalence of social media, and a growing number of Vermonters who are disconnected from the use of natural resources (and firearms), and the risk to the continued success of the Department is real. Not only do these actions undermine the Department's credibility with the public and jeopardize our ability to implement the conservation mission, the continuous personal attacks, FOIA's, and requests for information by phone and email, demoralize staff and ultimately deflect them from other critical duties.

d) Rebuilding Roxbury Fish Culture Station.

After years of struggling with FEMA to try and obtain fair reimbursement for the reconstruction of the Roxbury hatchery in Tropical Storm Irene, it appears that the Department is likely to receive roughly \$1 million from the federal agency. The total cost of the project is roughly \$5.5 million, the vast bulk of which relates to upgrades to meet the Vermont Water Quality Standards (the hatchery had been out of compliance for discharge even before the flood) and improvements to those standards. The Legislature approved roughly \$2.3 million in capital bill money in 2016, with a promise to fully fund the project in the next capital bill. One issue poses a threat to this rebuild – the risk that DEC will enforce water quality standards on water

withdrawal, severely limiting the amount of water taken from Flint Brook, a necessary historic source of water for the hatchery. Conversations with DEC are ongoing.

e) Moose mortality study

While biologists from the Department and elsewhere believe there is likely a combination of factors leading to poor recruitment of young moose and a failure to meet Vermont's population goals in all but a few WMU's, the exact cause of moose mortality is not definitely known. Therefore, the Department is embarking on a several year study of moose to determine how winter ticks, warmer winters, and other factors are playing into these problems. This study is being undertaken now in order to coincide with similar efforts in New Hampshire, Maine and perhaps in New York State. However, despite this collaboration, this study is likely to cost as much as \$400,000 or more. This study will represent all or nearly all of the "discretionary" money to be spent by the Wildlife Division in the next few budget cycles, and will consist primarily of federal money. One main objective will be to determine if the lower moose densities maintained in Vermont through issuing additional licenses in the late 1990's and early 2000's are indeed the reason our moose herd seems to be fairing somewhat better than those herds in neighboring states.

f) Lake Champlain sturgeon study

The Department is in the midst of a multi-year effort to assess the population and factors influencing the population of the state's endangered lake sturgeon. These massive, prehistoric and long-lived fish are both an important symbol of the Lake Champlain ecology, and an important species in their own right. This \$307,693 study uses the UVM supported network of sensor "listening" stations to track movement of sturgeon within the lake and the mouths of its tributaries. Goals will include assessing habitat challenges, dam impacts and perhaps the impact of sea lamprey on the species.

e) Black Bear wind study.

Due to a Public Service Board decision, the Department was assigned \$500,000 during the approval of the Deerfield Wind project in the Green Mountain National Forest and the obligation to fund and manage a study of the impact of the wind project on black bear, which use beechnuts at the site for fall and spring forage. This project has become longer-term than initially expected because of the delays in construction of the project. However, good "pre-build" data has been obtained, already revealing interesting patterns of movement of Vermont

black bears. The project, which will be the first study of its kind, is poised to enter the post-build phase once construction of the wind towers is completed.

f) Vermont Conservation Design

The Vermont Conservation Design project is an attempt to meet the Department's mandate to steward all wildlife, plants and habitats in Vermont through mapping and identification of key habitat or forest blocks and the interconnections between them. This work is an essential way to conserve species, including game and non-game species, by making sure that priority areas are identified and can be protected, whether through regulatory work, sustainable private lands stewardship, or through direct acquisition of land or easements. The first phase of this project is complete, and the second phase (refining the scale at which these habitats are understood and incorporation of species data to some extent) is underway.

g) Special Assistant/Operations Director

Kim Royar has served the Department brilliantly for 6 years as special assistant to the Commissioner (effectively deputy commissioner without supervisory authority). However, in large part because of the length of her commute to Montpelier and a desire to work directly with the Wildlife Division, Kim is transitioning to take on a variety of habitat and outreach projects for the division. In order to maintain continuity and allow the Commissioner to focus on external matters, the position of Business and Licensing Director Steve Gomez will transition to fulfilling an operational coordination role. Unlike in the past structure of the Department, Steve's position will be positioned between the Commissioner and the other division directors (who will remain direct reports to the Commissioner) but will instead be an expansion of this current role as budget coordinator. Steve will remain head of his current division, but will take on such issues as coordinating vehicle, overtime, facility and other policies that cross divisions. Meanwhile, Elizabeth Stratton will take on more of the day-to-day budget and licensing matters for the Department.

h) Habitat Stamp.

Roughly 18 months ago, the Department instituted a "habitat stamp" program which was begun as a way to both fund work on habitat acquisition and management for a variety of species and to attempt to obtain some funding from non-license holders who care about the Department's work but do not support that work through purchases. It has been very successful at the former, bringing in nearly \$100,000 (roughly ten times expected). However, most of the funding has come from hunters and anglers through the Department's licensing system. Therefore, two

steps are needed over the next year. The first is to demonstrate to purchasers where the money is being spent and why. The second is to redouble efforts to reach non-license holding members of the public who support habitat work to aid species they are interested in. Kim will work with the Outreach division and the Wildlife division staff to develop an implementation plan.

i) Hunter education and outreach.

The Department is in the process of re-evaluating and restructuring its hunter education and outreach efforts in several important ways. These programs have successfully reduced the rate of hunting-related shootings dramatically over the recent decades, an effort that much be preserved and continued. However, with an ever-more-busy public and decreased attention spans the Department must re-evaluate how it both educates and licenses hunters as well as how it attracts and encourages new hunters, anglers and trappers. This is true all over the country, but is particularly important in Vermont, where an increasing percentage of the population are relatively recent arrivals to the state and do not come from hunting, fishing or trapping backgrounds or families.

j. Strategic and Operational planning: The Strategic plan is the overarching document that guides Department activities. The original document was developed through both an internal and external public input process. It has recently been updated and should not need revisions for 10 years. Each division (except for LE) has developed an Operational plan based on the Strategic plan and the determination of budget priorities are tied to both. Steve Gomez will be leading the planning process.

### **III. Inter-Department Issues**

a) FPR Forester work.

Through an MOU the Department has paid for (federal funds primarily) FPR foresters to oversee logging operations and management on Department lands. This system has worked well for the Department. However, in the long term FPR would like those foresters to work on FPR timber sales. That would mean the Department would need to hire its own foresters to manage timber sales on Department land or contract for these services.

b) Forest highway funding.

Both FPR and the Department have a looming problem caused by the weakness in the forest highway account which impacts the ability to maintain and sustain critical infrastructure necessary to access forest land for timber management and game management, as well as recreation. In the Department's case this is exacerbated by the inability of the Kingdom Heritage



camp leaseholders trust account to keep up with needs on the roads and bridges of the West Mountain WMA.

c) Telecom leases on state land.

If DPS takes over preparing new lease agreements for telecom facilities on state land the values the mission of the Department must be protected. Not only is there a risk of mission conflict if a telecom facility is deemed necessary by DPS for achievement of its mission but runs contrary to the mission of the Department (wildlife conservation, habitat protection and wildlife recreational opportunities) but there are legal boundaries that may be crossed (for instance easement conditions and funding source requirements) that DPS may not be familiar with. Therefore, the Department should at least have final say over any leases on its land, or retain all authority in these areas. All fees and other income must also go to the Department for these leases.

d) DEC land management.

Several issues, including an improper timber harvest at Wrightsville Reservoir, have brought to light that DEC is managing state land without the proper expertise and staff. Therefore, we anticipate that DEC will propose that FPR and the Department take over management of those lands. However, those lands do not fit well with either the FPR or Department mission, meaning that some form of management for hire or other mechanism will have to be worked out. Minimally, any technical assistance or work done by FPR or DFW on DEC lands would necessitate an MOU that ensured appropriate compensation for time spent.

e) VTRANS wildlife passage.

The Department and the Vermont Agency of Transportation has been quite successful in working out aquatic organism passage practices and standards which meet both agencies objectives. These improved standards are a work in progress. However, there is another similar effort which needs to take place around the standards for road, bridge and culvert construction in order to meet the needs of wildlife passage. This effort has begun, but much more needs to be done to achieve similar benefits as those reached on the fish side. There has, however, been a long-standing and generally cordial partnership between DFW and VTRANS leadership and staff that has resulted in significant strides in fish and wildlife passage that is the envy of State Fish and Wildlife Agencies across the country.

#### **IV. Key Decision Dates**

2/28/2016 Fish & Wildlife Board appointments for Rutland and Orleans.

## **V. Legislation**

Due to a very busy Legislative schedule over the last six years (details below) the Department has implemented major changes in both policies and budgets. At this point, we do not anticipate the need for Department-driven legislative initiatives, with the exception of the budget, capital bill and (in 2018) fee bill changes. Instead, our Legislative efforts will be focused on combatting bills which run contrary to the Department's mission, likely including bills banning trapping and some forms of hunting. The Department will be prepared to consider any proposed changes.

After several years of major and important budgetary work in the Legislature to shore up an unsustainable budget situation (both from a funding and an accounting/management perspective) our budget for FY 2017 was relatively easy, in large part because we proposed a slight decrease in our General Fund request. With a flat General Fund request anticipated for FY 2018, a transparent and well managed budget, and a budget document that connects budget priorities to the strategic plan indicators we hope for a similarly smooth legislative road in 2017.

Despite legislative support for rebuilding the Roxbury fish hatchery, we anticipate needing to make the case for the 2018/2019 capital bill to contain the remaining funding for that project.

## **VI. Key External Organizations and Individuals**

Fish and Wildlife Board – Chair Kevin Lawrence

Vermont Trapper's Association – Bruce Baroffio

Vermont Federation of Sportsman's Club – Chris Bradley, Evan Hughes, Clint Gray (former)

Vermont Bear Hound Association – Butch Spears

Endangered Species Committee – Dorothy Allard (also Jim Andrews, not a member of the ESC but active in the Amphibian/Reptile Species Advisory Group)

UVM – Nancy Mathews, Jed Murdoch, Allan Strong, Jon Erickson, Ellen Marsden

USGS Wildlife COOP – Donna Parrish, Terri Donovan

Lake Champlain International – James Ehlers

Protect our Wildlife – Brenna Galdenzi

Humane Society of the United States – Barry Londeree, Joanne Bourbeau

USDA Wildlife Services – David Allaben, Fred Pogmore

The Nature Conservancy – Heather Furman

Audubon Vt – Jim Shallow

VNRC – Jon Groveman, Jamey Fidel, Brian Shupe

Conservation Law Foundation – Chris Kilian

Vermont Center for Ecostudies – Chris Rimmer

Lake Champlain Walleye Association – Bob Samson, Cubby Smith

Backcountry Hunters and Anglers – Tovar Cerulli, Eric Nuse

USFWS – Andrew Milliken, Ken Strum, Wendi Webber

Landscape Conservation Cooperative (LCC USFWS)—Ken Elowe, Scott Schwank

AFWA – Ron Regan, Glenn Normandeau (NH), Cathy Sparks (RI), Bill Hyatt (CT)

Hunters, Anglers, Trappers – Ed Gallo

Vermont Traditions Coalition – Frank Stanley

Green Mountain Animal Defenders – Sharon MacNair

Center for Biological Diversity – Mollie Matteson

Sierra Club – Robb Kidd, Rachel Stevens

Trout Unlimited Chapters – Jared Carpenter, Joe Mark, Grey Hagwood, Clark Amadon, Jackie Jordan

Burlington Free Press – Lawrence Pyne

Rutland Herald/Times-Argus – Dennis Jensen

WCAX – Anson Tebbetts

Vermont Land Trust – Gil Livingston

Ruffed Grouse Society – Jay and Crystal Pierce

Vermont Turkey and Young Guns – Steve Lafarr

Vermont Wild Turkey Federation – Don Isabelle

Vermont Coverts—Lisa Sausville

Vermont Woodland Association—Put Blodgett

Northern Woodlands Magazine—Elise Tillinghast

## **VII. General Information**

The operation of the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department is structured in part through a series of regularly occurring meetings. The Fish and Wildlife Board meetings are the most important of these, and occur each month with the exception of November (when we take a month off for hunting seasons) and usually one of the mid-summer meetings (which we typically skip because of a slack time in the Board's schedule). Of course, the rulemaking process also has its own schedule of public

hearings which must go with each change in order for the public to be adequately informed and engaged.

The Endangered Species Committee, while an advisory committee to the ANR Secretary, is staffed by the Department, and its work is most closely related to the work of the Department. Therefore, these meetings (usually 2-4 times a year typically) are important to the work of the Department, particularly as it relates to non-game work.

Since both the ESC and Board work primarily on wildlife issues (although both have a role with fish management) Wildlife Division Director Mark Scott has been the main point of contact for both the ESC and the Board.

In addition to these, the Department management team meets each week on Monday at 1 pm. This meeting including the division directors (including Steve Gomez as the DO), the Department's attorney (Catherine Gjessing), the commissioner's assistant (Mary Smith), the major of the wardens (George Scribner), the hatchery chief (Adam Miller), and two members of Education and Outreach in addition to the division director, Tom Rogers and John Hall. While this is a large group, it has proven useful to have a broad spectrum of participants, particularly since the work of Department is diverse by subject and by geography despite being a relatively small department. The meeting has been run by Kim Royar, special assistant to the Commissioner. However, as Steve Gomez is transitioning into more of an operational role he may assume oversight and organization of this meeting.

Each of the five divisions also has its own meetings of its members, although each is structured somewhat differently. The Wildlife and Fish Divisions tend to have a more organized and regular schedule of all-staff meetings, given their size. The Fish and Wildlife Warden service meets together twice a year, at the all-staff Department day and at an all warden day. However, they also gather for training annually. However, the four Lieutenants, the Major and the Colonel also meet a few times a year to talk about issues or new policies and procedures, which is where the detailed work of any changes in operations in the Law Enforcement Division are hammered out. Education and Outreach and Business and Licensing also meeting as divisions a few times a year, but given their smaller sizes and that most of their employees work out of Montpelier these tend to be more ad hoc gatherings. Members of the licensing division, Wildlife Division Big Game Team, LE (the Colonel and/or the Major), the business office and Outreach meet 2 to 3 times/year to coordinate any necessary changes to the Point of Sale system, outreach to/oversight of license agents, and other issues that intersect between the 5 divisions.

Once a year we get as many Department employees together as can be away from their duty stations for an all-staff Department Day. This gathering is an important chance to talk about the larger issues in our work, give the staff an opportunity to present and discuss the details of some of their field work, as well as a chance to recognize staff for extraordinary effort or exemplary performance. Usually an individual and a team award is given, as well as certificates acknowledging the longevity of employees' tenure in the Department. The Central office organizes the meeting agenda and logistics.

#### **VIII. Anything Else**

The Fish and Wildlife Department has experienced a very successful half-decade. After emerging from a significant deficit with the help of an increased General Fund appropriations and better accounting practices, the Department filled a number of vacant positions which had been left empty for budgetary reasons, updated equipment and vehicles which had become outdated and in some cases dangerous, and improved our internal controls, procedures and structure.

In recent years the Department has successfully advocated to make a variety of policy and management improvements internally and through Legislative and Board action. Among them:

- Reaffirming through statute that wildlife in Vermont is a public trust resource.
- Adding an appreciable number of acres to the land owned and managed by the Department.
- Legalizing crossbows for hunters 50 years old and up who are not disabled.
- Legalizing gun suppressors for use at shooting ranges.
- Establishing two new state-owned shooting ranges.
- Nearly completely drawing down available federal funding, including by utilizing donated land as local match.
- Passage of new protections for threatened and endangered species habitat under state law.
- Achieved a re-invigoration of the warden force through filling long vacant positions.
- Managed a complete turnover in leadership of the warden force, with a new Colonel, new Major and four new Lieutenants.
- Began the successful habitat stamp program, bringing in \$50,000 or more a year to help acquire and manage state lands for wildlife habitat through a voluntary program.
- Enjoyed record attendance at wildlife and fish festivals around the state.

- Launched three new conservation license plates to increase revenue and awareness.
- A complete rebuild of the Buck Lake Conservation Camp dining and education facility in Woodbury.
- Renovation of the house at Dead Creek into office space and a visitor center.
- Moved license sales for the Department online, saving money and making licenses more accessible.
- Removed the final sickly white tailed deer at the Bennington Veterans Home and successfully replaced them with Fallow Deer. This effort, done in conjunction with the Agency of Agriculture Food and Markets, provided additional animals at the facility (a goal of lawmakers and residents) while eliminating a long-standing violation of the public trust doctrine. It also replaced “wild” deer with a species much better suited to life in an enclosure.
- Decreased land lock salmon and lake trout (and likely other species such as endangered sturgeon) wounding rates through lamprey management.
- Secured state and federal funding to rebuild the Roxbury Fish Culture Station, destroyed by Tropical Storm Irene.
- Improved fish hatchery energy efficiency, saving \$80,000 or more a year and reducing hatchery environmental footprint.
- Installed solar panels at the fish hatcheries to further offset cost and environmental impact of electricity use (ongoing).
- Rebuilt the John Guilmette access area in South Hero. This large access area will now have improved parking, traffic flow, ADA access and better boat access.
- Established through donated land a new official fishing access on Great Hosmer Pond, where an informal access had been for many years.
- Completed Lake Champlain creel surveys for the first time in a number of years.
- Listed nine new species under state threatened and endangered species law.
- Enhanced penalties and the ability to collect restitution for repeat fish and wildlife law violators.
- Banned use of natural fluid based deer lure to try and limit risk of CWD
- Banned use of drones for hunting, fishing and scouting game.
- Opened veterans’ moose lottery to all qualified veterans.
- Established through statistically rigorous surveys that the Department and the mission has tremendous support for its work both among the general public and among hunters and anglers.

- Worked with UVM's Gund Institute to develop report on the Economics of Conservation, including economic impact of land conservation, tourism and wildlife based activities.
- Expansion of various seasons and opportunities, including early bear season, longer archery season, and (soon) allowing spearing for some fish species.
- Improved staff morale as indicated by both internal and Human Resources surveys.

Assimilating and putting into practice all of these changes and new initiatives have strained staff and the public. Therefore, our plan for 2017 has been to not roll out new legislation or changes in policy but to consolidate and put into working order changes made in recent years and complete ongoing projects. Those projects include the completion of the Roxbury Fish Culture Station rebuild, the continued work on angler outreach (with a focus on Western Vermont, including Chittenden County) and continued work on the Department's habitat work and Habitat Stamp project.

## Conclusion

The Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department is unique in state government in several important and positive ways. Its staff is mission driven, it enjoys unparalleled support among its customers and the general public, and it relies to a great extent on cooperation of volunteers and allies. However, it also faces real challenges to its vital mission, including a state with changing demographics, impacts of climate change and other large-scale alterations, continuing erosion of habitat and a public with a decreased ability and interest in engaging with the natural world. We are all counting on the Department to meet and overcome these challenges, by being thoughtful, honest, transparent and flexible, as it has been.