South Bay Wildlife Management Area

Last edited: 9/30/22

General Description

South Bay Wildlife Management Area (WMA) is comprised of a composite of publicly and privately owned lands. It is located primarily in two separate blocks totaling 2,063 acres. It is managed by the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department. Both blocks are dominated by wetland complexes where large meandering rivers (the Barton and the Black) enter South Bay of Lake Memphremagog. The WMA ownership pattern is complex, as there are State parcels held in fee ownership, private lands to which the State has been permanently deeded hunting, fishing, and/or trapping rights, and parcels owned by the State upon which private individuals have retained trapping and/or hunting rights.

Access can be had by boat from 3 locations and roads on three sides of the WMA.

History

The wetlands of South Bay were originally forested with conifers such as northern white cedar, larch and white spruce. Extensive logging of the Memphremagog watershed occurred during the late 19th century. Flooding and siltation resulting from this large-scale deforestation prepared the land for its succession to marshland. In addition, a dam constructed in 1883 at the outlet of the lake stabilized the water level nearly four feet higher than the historic norm. This greatly altered the hydrology and soils surrounding South Bay, leading to colonization by the shrubs and marsh plants found there today.

The land comprising South Bay WMA was originally owned by farmers, investors, the City of Newport and the town of Coventry. The properties were bought in many different parcels between 1965 and 1993. A variety of funds were used, including monies from the U.S. Land and Water Conservation Act, the Federal Pittman-Robertson Act and State Fish & Wildlife and Vermont Waterfowl Funds. State funds are generated from the sale of hunting and fishing licenses and Duck Stamps. Pittman-Robertson funds are generated from a tax on hunting equipment.

In addition to purchasing lands outright, the State has been deeded hunting, fishing and trapping rights by several private landowners who own parcels adjacent to State lands.

Habitat Features

A diverse mosaic of wetlands dominates the WMA. These include extensive red maple–northern white cedar swamps, sweet gale–buttonbush shrub swamps, riverine floodplain forests, sedge meadows, cattail marshes, and bulrush–bur-reed marshes in deeper water. An upland parcel west of the Newport Airport contains two old fields with scattered apple trees and a stand of white pine. Hunting rights exist for an upland field and white pine stand northeast of the airport, and for several fields east of Miller's Pond.

Red maple–cedar swamps and shrub swamps are excellent examples of ecologically significant communities. A fen in the Barton Block is habitat for three rare plants. The thin-flowered sedge and State-endangered creeping sedge are also present. The Barton River portion of the WMA was designated a National Natural Landmark by the National Park Service in 1973.

Common Fish and Wildlife

Mammals The wetlands of South Bay WMA are important habitat for several aquatic mammals, including muskrat, mink, river otter, raccoon and beaver. Fox, eastern coyote, fisher, bobcat, skunk, red squirrel and weasel are commonly found in the forested wetlands, upland fringes of the marshes, and in nearby fields.
White-tailed deer, black bear and moose are found in the pine-hemlock forests and in fields. They move through the marshes and forested wetlands as well.

Birds South Bay WMA is an important waterfowl production and migration area, particularly for black ducks, mallards and wood ducks. The red maple floodplain forests provide important food and nesting habitat for wood ducks, goldeneyes and hooded mergansers, and the marshes and associated open water areas are excellent mallard and black duck brooding habitat. Favorable ruffed grouse habitat on the WMA is limited to the old fields and pine-aspen forest west of the Newport Airport.

The great diversity of forested and wetland habitats provides excellent bird-watching opportunities, particularly for wetland and marsh species. Herons, bitterns, ospreys, northern harriers, snipe, pied-billed grebes, rails, common moorhens, marsh wrens, black terns and occasionally bald eagles inhabit the marshes. Many other species including flycatchers, swallows, barred owls, great horned owls, red-tailed hawks, and many neotropical migrants are found on the WMA. The rare upland sandpiper has nested in the fields near the Newport Airport.

Reptiles and Amphibians Painted and snapping turtles may be found in the marshes throughout the WMA. A diversity of frogs, including spring peepers, gray tree, bull, green, mink, wood, northern leopard and pickerel frogs, inhabit the marshes and vernal pools. Red-spotted newts are common, and blue-spotted, red-backed and northern two-lined salamanders are likely inhabitants of the forests.

Fish Large and smallmouth bass, chain pickerel, yellow perch, bullheads and pumpkinseed sunfish may be caught in the river mouths, Miller Creek and adjacent South Bay. Brown trout are present in the upper portion of the Black River (near Coventry), and rainbow trout (steelhead) pass through the marshes on their annual spawning runs up the Black and Barton Rivers in late April-early May.

Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department

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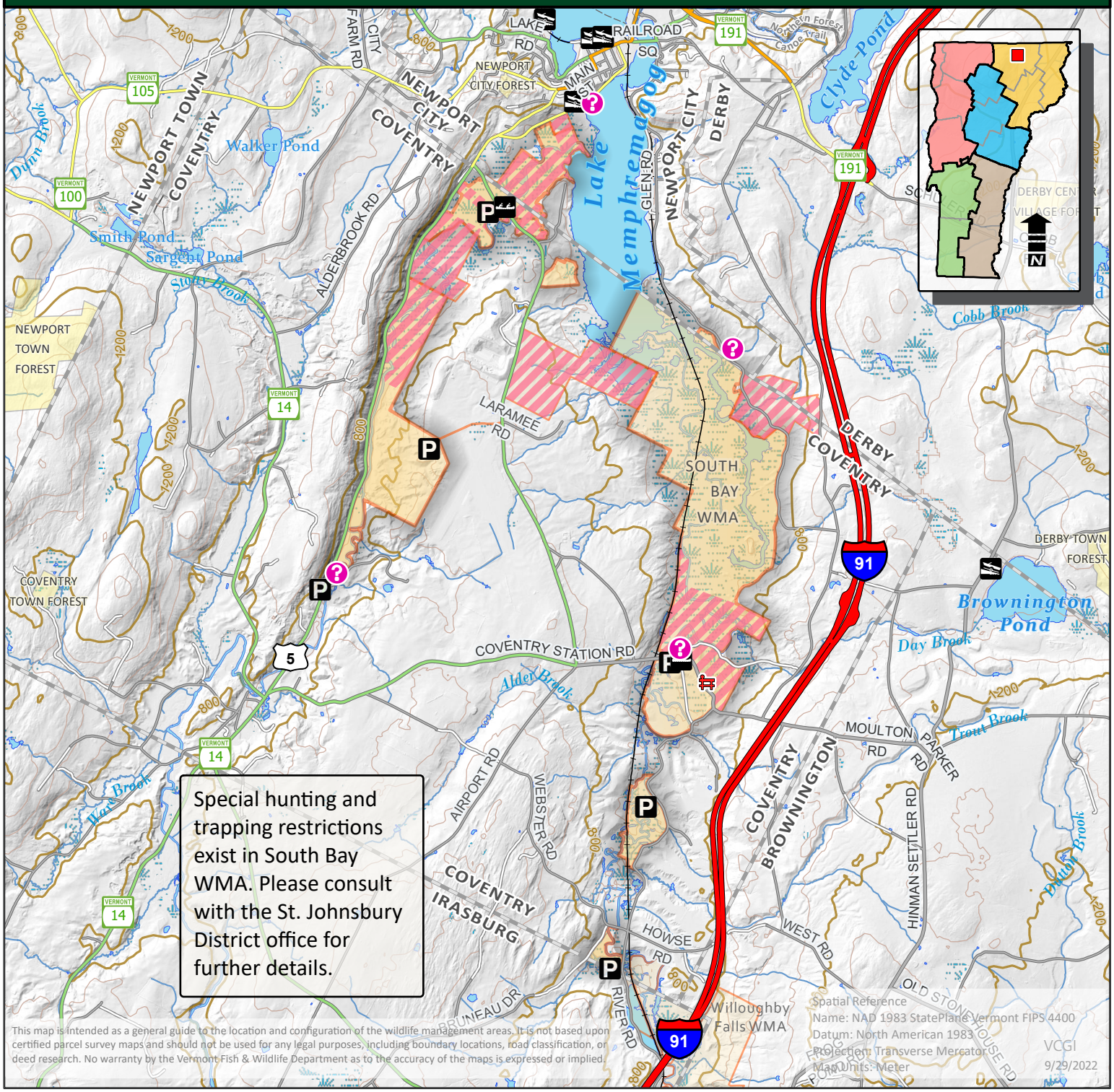

South Bay WMA

Map Number: 25

- Parking
- Boat Ramp
- Cartop Access
- Park Office
- Shooting Range
- Wildlife Viewing Area
- Campground
- Vista
- Fishing Access
- Visitor Information
- Gate
- Rail Lines
- Trails
- Town Boundary
- Wildlife Management Area
- WMA Hunting Rights Only
- Refuge (no public access)
- Special hunting/trapping restrictions
- Streambank Management Area
- Controlled Hunting Area
- Federal Land
- State Land
- Town Land