

Ward Marsh Wildlife Management Area

General Description

Ward Marsh Wildlife Management Area (WMA) is an 81-acre parcel that is owned by the State of Vermont and managed by the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department. It is located in the town of West Haven along the New York – Vermont state line, along the west bank of the Poultney River. Access to the WMA is from Bay Road that runs along the eastern edge of the WMA.

History

The Poultney River has a rich history, from Native Americans and the Revolutionary War to mills and industries. The river has long been an important resource for mills. It is named after the town of Poultney, which was one of the town names New Hampshire colonial governor Benning Wentworth chose to honor British gentry.

Ward Marsh WMA was named after Clayton Ward, who initiated donation of the parcel. The Ward family, along with members of the Adams family, donated the parcel to the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department in 1976. The only visible remains of people dwelling on this marshy land are a cellar hole and part of an old stone bridge that used to go across the northern end of the marsh. The cellar hole is the site of a house remembered as the Old Steves Place.

Habitat Features

This WMA is a cattail marsh with a seasonally flooded red and silver maple-forest fringe. Cattail marshes are thought to be common and uninteresting; but in fact they are highly productive ecosystems and provide critical habitat for many wildlife species. There is about 3,900 feet of shoreline frontage along the Poultney River on the east side of Ward Marsh WMA.

The Poultney River is one of Vermont's most biologically diverse rivers. It was designated an Outstanding Resource Water for its natural, cultural and scenic values, which gives it more protection. The lower reach of the Poultney River has the greatest diversity of mussels in the State, containing several rare and endangered mussels. The river is also rich in fish and other aquatic



Pied-billed grebe with chicks.
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fauna. For scenic value, the Poultney River has a significant undeveloped river corridor that stretches 22 miles and includes Ward Marsh.

Common Fish and Wildlife

Mammals One can find signs of wetland mammals such as beaver, raccoon, muskrat, mink and otter. Muskrats use cattails as a food supply and as building material for their small, conical lodges. A colony of muskrats can have a major impact on cattail marshes, forming a mosaic of open water and vegetation that is ideal waterfowl habitat. Small, often overlooked, wetland mammals include long-tailed weasel, star-nosed mole and water shrew. Little brown bats can be seen foraging on insects over the Poultney River in the summer months.

Upland mammals that may be encountered are white-tailed deer, bobcat, red fox, cottontail rabbit, porcupine, striped skunk, meadow vole and field mouse.

Birds The cattail marsh of Ward Marsh provides critical habitat for many species of birds, including marsh wrens, red-winged blackbirds, swamp sparrows, American bitterns, least bitterns, pied-billed grebes and Virginia rails. Other water birds that utilize the marsh are great blue herons, kingfishers, black, wood and mallard ducks, and Canada geese. Great and snowy egrets are occasional visitors.

Many other wetland bird species can be seen during migration. Some raptors that occur are northern harrier, red-tailed hawk, turkey vulture, osprey and occasional bald eagle. Bluebirds breed here, as well as more common songbirds such as common yellowthroats, yellow warblers and Baltimore orioles.

Reptiles and Amphibians The Poultney River and the wetlands of Ward Marsh provides good habitat for amphibians including spotted and four-toed salamanders, eastern newts, mudpuppies, northern leopard, gray tree, bull and green frogs, spring peepers and American toads. The mudpuppy is an interesting species. It is a large salamander, usually 8-13 inches in length, with large bushy external gills that it retains throughout its life. It is totally aquatic and can be found in the Poultney River.

Reptiles present on this WMA include snapping, painted and common musk turtles, eastern rat, eastern ribbon, brown, milk, northern water and common garter snakes.

Fish There are a large number of fish species in the Poultney River. Brown bullhead, white and yellow perch, large and smallmouth bass, walleye, and many other Lake Champlain fish species may be found or caught. The State-endangered eastern sand darter is known to occur here.

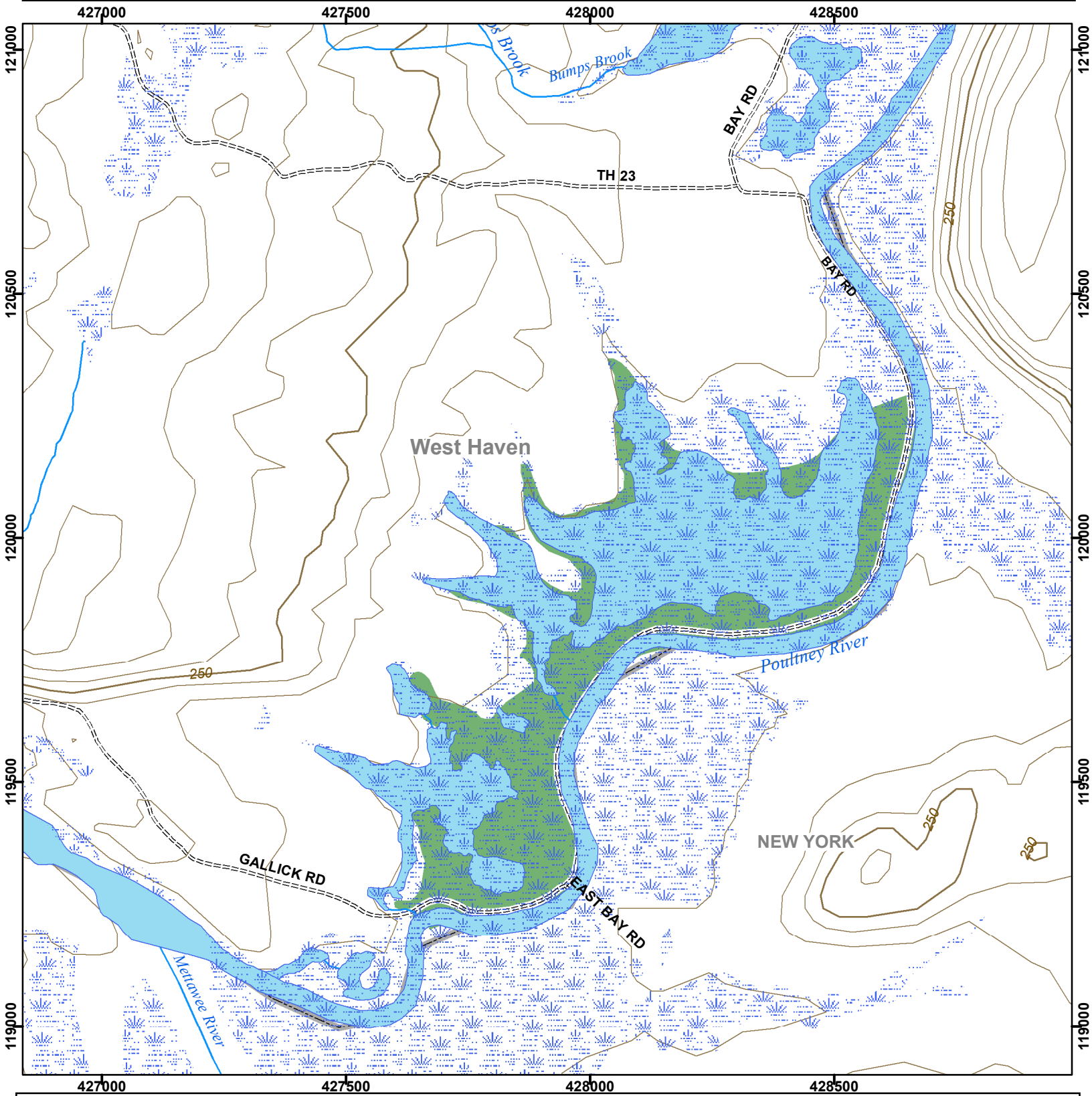
Ward Marsh provides important spawning habitat for northern pike, chain pickerel and several minnow species.

Ward Marsh WMA is open to regulated hunting, trapping, fishing, hiking and wildlife viewing.

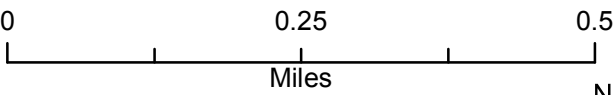


Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department

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Ward Marsh WMA: 81 acres



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- Wildlife Management Area
- Other Public Land
- Private with Public Access
- Wildlife Viewing Areas
- Car-top Access
- Parking
- Boat Ramp
- Gate
- Designated Camp Site During Big Game Seasons Only