



# Spring 2021 Newsletter

"We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect." -Aldo Leopold, Foreword, *A Sand County Almanac*

## **F&W Board Report**

by Mike Kolsun, F&W Board Rep, Essex County

F&W Board meetings continue via Zoom. I have to say that I'm appreciating the positive aspects of Zoom. More attendance by the public, who can do it from the comfort of home and also avoid driving to a board meeting in Montpelier.

Issues that have been covered are the waterfowl regulations, last year's moose analysis and the upcoming recommendations for the 2021 moose season and the simplification of fish regulations. The board did the initial approval of those items, which now will go to public comment.

With the switch to online Hunter, Bow and Trapper Education, 2020 saw record breaking numbers of certifications. On a good year, before Covid, between Conservation Camps and 200+ in person classes, certification numbers ran between 2500-3500 students. Last year broke the record, with over 7900 new hunters coming into the fold.

Hunting and fishing license sales were both up by 25% and 35%. This not only happened in Vermont, but nationwide. Add to that a record year of firearm sales. 28 million new gun sales in 2020, 43% of which were woman. Multiple reasons for this spike, not all of it being about hunting. Most of those sales were about concerns for personal safety. Again, here's an opportunity to provide education to new gun owners and preserve a tradition of safety and public service. Most importantly, all of these sales have generated an 11% tax for PR money for land acquisition and gun ranges open to hunting, fishing and trapping.

There is a big push to try and develop an effective mentor/mentee program for the new Novice season. As an instructor, I see this particular issue as being critical to bringing a whole new group into our ranks. Many people who 'sat on the fence' about hunting are now interested in pursuing that lifestyle. We MUST accommodate their interest or risk losing the numbers we need so badly. In the past I've struggled with the changes to our society, culture and the way of life all of us hold so dear. I've come to realize that cell phones are NOT going to disappear and that social media and the impact it has are here to

stay. Taking advantage of their interest is critical to our future.

What we CAN do is learn how to work with it and adapt our passion to the outdoors to introduce this group to conservation and wise use of renewable resources. Instructors, who used to teach classes in person, are now freed up to shift gears and actually give that online graduate the hands on 'dirt time' they need to be successful. How we do that starts with each and every one of us by looking in the mirror and asking the question, "What can I do?" It's really that simple. You DON'T have to be a certified instructor to mentor a Novice. You just need to get them up to speed on shooting, scouting, permission to hunt on private land and sit with them during the hunt. No heavy gun to carry, just snacks, a camera, license and some quiet guidance.

Don't get overwhelmed by the immensity of this opportunity. How do you eat an elephant? ONE BITE AT A TIME.

As always, the door is open, the coffee pot is on and your feedback, suggestions or questions are encouraged. - Mike Kolsun 723-6678

## **President's Message- The View from Here**

by Matt Breton

What have we been up to? Despite a pandemic, a fair amount. The hatchery is raising brook trout, we're helping on a smelt survey again this year in coordination with VT F&W Dept and the Seymour Lake Association. We've applied for a grant to assist with a Trout in the Classroom project in three local schools. Last fall we assisted in a moose survey using trail cameras, and will help pick up those that remain out there this spring.

Proudly, the hatchery is now called The Peter Engels Fish Culture Station. We have just established a scholarship at North Country High School in the name of a long-time board member, Byron Fish. We're hoping to gather when the weather is good and the pandemic abates to celebrate these men who've been instrumental in the success of this group.

As I reflect on the year behind us, and look forward to the one ahead, I find the idea of getting young folks involved while we also honor a couple of guys who have spent their lifetimes devoted to conservation quite beautiful. The wheel keeps spinning, and it takes hunters, trappers, and anglers like all of you to keep it going. We'll never get it perfect, things are always changing, and we're going to

disagree about any number of things, but we have to keep plugging away, bringing our voices to the discussion.

Don't forget to invite new voices- those of us with gray in our beards should make sure there is space to bring in new hunters and the next generations of conservationists. We've had some challenges with the website and are happy to take a membership renewal (see below) by mail. It will help keep us going.

In the meantime, get out and have some fun in the woods and on the water. Ice fishing and hare hunting are wrapping up and we'll be fishing open water and talking turkey soon.

### **Hatchery Update- March 2021**

By Peter Engels, Director

VTFWCG received our hatchery eggs were early this year – 54,000 eggs were received from the Roxbury hatchery on November 5, 2020, which is 4 to six weeks early. The eggs were monitored daily, as usual; hatching was also early, as expected. All eggs were hatched by mid-December; all fish were then put into one tank, as the tanks in our hatchery are large enough for about 70,000 fish in each tank. As usual, the hatchery monitors check each day for dead fish, signs of disease, water temperature and oxygen level. The fish began to feed in late January.

These are sterile fish; they won't reproduce, but they should grow to a decent size, and taste just like any other brook trout. However, there won't be as many to stock this year.

Again, this year, Weyerhaeuser Lumber Company gave us permission to stock brookies on their land, so beaver ponds were stocked locally, in addition to a few other places in coordination with biologists and staff from the VT Dept of F&W.

### **My First Buck Tale**

#### **The Engaged Outdoorswoman**

By Meghan Laferriere

*(Meghan is an emergent hunter who participated in the first adult hunter-ed course that the VFWCG sponsored. She's also a heck of a brook trout angler! -mb)*

My third year of rifle season was here and I was ready with even more confidence and enthusiasm. The conditions were so different this year with little to no snow, warmer than normal temps, and the loud crunch of leaves. Now the biggest challenge of all – finding a hunting spot. I almost always hunt solo and my navigation skills are a work in progress, so finding the ideal location takes time.

If you hunt in VT, then you know more private land than not is posted. My husband and I would drive around finding locations, only to realize they were posted. I approached several landowners for permission, and they declined. How in the world is someone going to hunt when all the land seems restricted! We finally found a spot that I felt comfortable with and I settled in there.

I spent the first few days getting comfortable with my surroundings and locating where the deer were traveling. Without snow it was hard to see tracks, however I knew they were around with all the sign I was seeing. On day three, shortly after sunrise, I had a young spikehorn come by, but he was traveling so fast that I didn't have time to shoot. As I look back now, I'm glad I didn't get him. I decided to invite my dad along to hunt the next day and he eagerly accepted.

As I sat drinking my coffee that morning, I just had this feeling it was going to be a good day. Looking at those two mounts on our wall, maybe it was my turn to add one. Fresh snow, my dad joining, and seeing that spike gave me hope.

I arrived before my dad and navigated to my spot in the dark and found the tree I was going to lean on. Dad's light drifted past me in the dark and quiet of the early morning. He was going to set up about 150 yards away. I was ready and eager, but barely moving. As it started to get light, it also started to snow so hard that I could barely see. It was so calm that I could hear the snow falling. Then, as fast as it started, it stopped.

As soon as the snow stopped, the silence was broken. Behind me I heard footsteps coming down the hill. As I turned my eyes to the left, I knew it was a deer. It stopped directly beside me about 25 yards away. I must have been scented. I slowly moved my gun and turned my body to get the deer in the scope. I was twisted like a pretzel but didn't care; I knew I had to be as still as possible. The deer was behind a shrub. Looking through the scope, all I could see was horns above and feet below. I took off the safety and he then turned around to head back the same way he had come, but he was still behind the shrub. I had to focus; I knew I was going to need to shoot through that shrub. My heart was beating so hard out my chest and in my ears that it was all I could hear. I could still see his left front foot below and horns above. As I took aim, he stomped his left foot. Before I knew it, I had pulled the trigger and away he went.

I tried to gather my nerves and attempted to stop shaking with excitement, but that wasn't happening. I walked over behind the shrub and looked down. No blood, no tracks. Did I miss him? I could

have sworn he was right there, but my excitement had just taken over. I sent my dad a text telling him it was me and that I wasn't sure I had hit the buck. He replied that I should wait a minute, or 5, then asked if there was much blood. I sent a message back, "I don't see blood and I can't stop shaking!" He replied, "That's normal." As I looked up, I finally saw some blood and heard some thrashing. At that point, I knew I had hit him and I was freaking out.

I let Dad know, and he replied that we'll find him. I started to follow the blood up the hill, and saw more and more. I raised my head up to look at the top of the hill and there he was!

I slowly walked up to him, no movement. Then I realized how big he is and count the points, then count the points again. I messaged my dad, "He's big", and a reply, "Is he down?" "Yes!" Dad replied back, "Yeah! Give me a loud hoot." Then my dad appeared and I ran to him and gave him a big hug and said, "Wait 'til you see him!" We were both overwhelmed with excitement. "Wow!" What a moment for both of us. We took several photos and sent them off in various texts.

I wasn't sure how I would feel about killing my first deer. Would I be sad, would I cry, how would I feel? You can never prepare for your first kill. I was overjoyed with excitement that nature had provided me with food; this was a part of life... a cycle of life, he came my way for a reason. What I love about hunting and being in the woods is learning. I learn something every time I step into the woods.

Now it was time to dress the deer and, go figure, of all days I had left my pack in the truck. Good thing my dad had his. I had watched several YouTube videos on field dressing and felt like I was ready. With a little coaching from Dad, I was feeling confident. It went well and I saw that the bullet had hit him right where I aimed, the heart. Once he was all dressed, we dragged him to the truck. When we got there, I realized in all the excitement I forgot to tag him, which I should have done first. After several more photos, we headed off to get him weighed.

After a lot of dedication and countless hours, it had paid off. I had bagged myself an 8 point 168-

pound buck. I couldn't have asked for a better deer! The experience and bonding that both my Dad and I shared that day will be with us forever. Yes, this buck will be joining my husband's other two on the wall!

## Headwaters

By Paul Noel

The day felt a bit raw for fishing and a very uneventful turkey season was mercifully over. I was restless and needed to get out. Then I remembered the several tree stands that needed to be taken down from last fall.

The walk to the first was a short one with the cool air keeping the black flies at a temporary truce. Within sight of the stand a whitetail jumped up and took a couple bounds. She stopped and looked around with a sleek red coat, big brown eyes and radar ears--almost unbearably beautiful. She was a big mature doe

and I looked closely to see if she was heavy with fawn. Nope, no big belly. She lingered and kept staring at me. A bit odd but summertime deer often behave more calmly. I thought to myself how I wished I had seen her in October during archery season. I never saw a deer from this stand last year and now I encounter one at 12 yards.

Finally, I took a couple steps and she reluctantly departed. And then I heard it. A very soft mew which would

have been drowned out if I had been walking. She had already dropped a fawn, one at least. I couldn't see the bedded fawn, but it sounded very near. It would be just days old, maybe only hours. I thought of returning with a camera but quickly decided against that. I didn't try to get any closer. That new family didn't need any additional stress supplied by me. I backed out and left the taking down of the stand for another time.

Walking to the truck I was glad I didn't cross paths with that gorgeous doe last hunting season; a completely different emotion that I was feeling just a few minutes ago. And I pictured that brand new delicate fawn nestled down in the fresh greenery, possibly a young buck. Maybe I would encounter him in a few years. But it doesn't matter. I got a glimpse of their secret, sacred world. And that's more than enough for me.





## **Recreating Habitat for Bluebirds in the NEK**

By Molly Cook

Over the years, the loss of open and agricultural lands and the introduction of the European starling and the house sparrow have caused a decline in bluebirds. Both starlings and house sparrows are cavity nesters and are very aggressive. House sparrows can enter any hole that a bluebird can and will chase away or kill bluebirds. Starlings will out-compete bluebirds for natural cavities such as woodpecker holes but can be excluded from nest boxes by using the correct size entrance hole.

During the summer, bluebirds feed mainly on insects and berries. Providing a nesting box or starting a bluebird trail will help attract and sustain them.

Creating a bluebird trail, which is a series of bluebird boxes placed along a prescribed route of suitable habitat has been effective in increasing bluebird populations.

**THE NEST BOX:** A good bluebird box should be well ventilated, watertight and have drainage holes. It should be easy to open, monitor and clean. Solid, untreated wood is an ideal material. A bluebird box should not have a perch. Predatory house sparrows and house wrens are attracted to perches. The bluebird house should have a round hole, measuring  $1\frac{3}{16}$ " in diameter, or a vertical oval, measuring  $1\frac{3}{8}$ " x  $2\frac{1}{4}$ ". Although bluebirds seem to prefer oval holes, smaller European starlings may be able to enter them, especially if they are not exactly  $1\frac{3}{8}$ " x  $2\frac{1}{4}$ ".

### **MOUNTING THE BLUEBIRD BOX:**

Smooth  $\frac{1}{2}$ " - 1" round pipe is probably the best and simplest mounting system to use, but any smooth scrap round pipe will also work. Installing hardware cloth or a baffle, coating the pole with cooking oil or food-grade grease will help to keep climbing predators away from the box.

### **SETTING UP A BLUEBIRD TRAIL:**

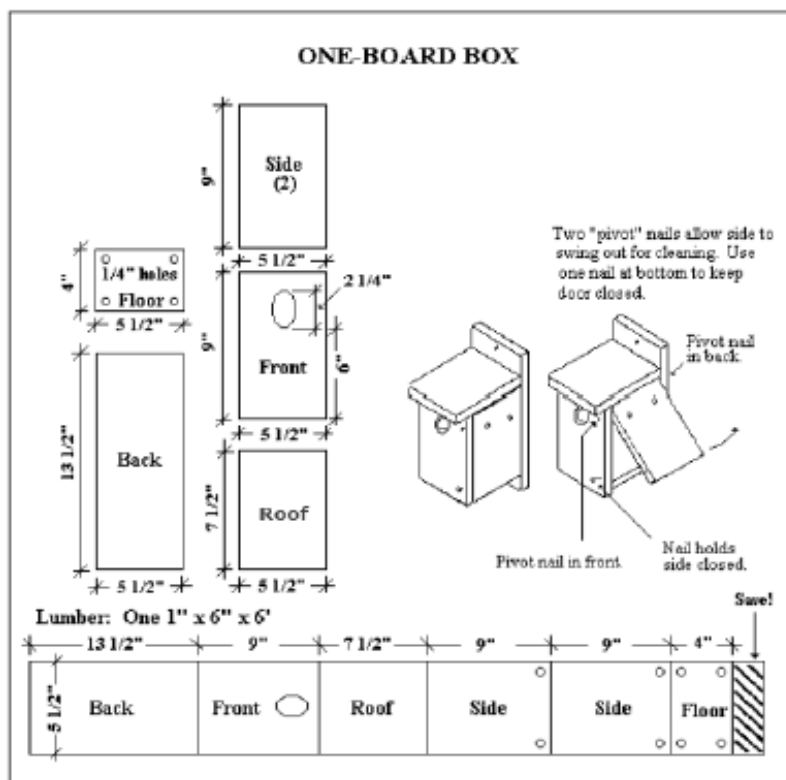
Habitat is the key factor to consider when setting up a bluebird trail. Open country with scattered trees and low or sparse ground cover is best. Suitable habitat should include a fence line, wires, tree branches, or other sites where bluebirds can perch to search for food. Pastures, parks away from human traffic and mowed areas such as cemeteries and golf courses are all good locations for a bluebird trail. Avoid areas of heavy pesticide use. Nest boxes should be mounted at least 50–200 feet away from brushy and heavily wooded areas, for this is the habitat of the house wren, a native species that may destroy bluebird eggs and/or compete with bluebirds for nest boxes.

Avoid areas where the house sparrow is abundant, such as farmsteads and feedlots, or where birdseed containing millet and cracked corn is present. House sparrows are vicious competitors. For convenience, mount nest boxes so the entrance hole is approximately five feet above the ground. Face the nest box away from prevailing winds, and if possible, face it toward a tree or shrub that is within 100 feet of the box to provide a landing spot for the young bluebirds when they first leave the box. Bluebird houses should be placed 100 yards apart, minimum.

**MONITORING A BLUEBIRD TRAIL:** Learn to recognize a bluebird nest. It is a cup-shaped nest that is usually made entirely of woven grass or pine needles. Remove nests of any other species. Once bluebirds have nested, check the boxes at least once or twice a week during the until chicks are close to fledging. Do not open the box after nestlings are 12–13 days old. Doing so could result in the nestlings leaving the box before they are able to fly, greatly reducing their chance of survival.

Welcome any other native bird that uses your nest box, such as chickadees, titmice, nuthatches and tree swallows, as these small cavity nesters need help, too.

Male bluebirds arrive first to establish and defend a territory. Once the females arrive, nesting



usually begins in March or April, depending on weather conditions. Have your bluebird boxes in place by early spring when the bluebirds are looking for nesting sites.

Bluebirds usually lay 4 or 5 light blue eggs. The incubation period for bluebird eggs is 12–14 days. They hatch 17 days after the first egg is laid. Nestlings remain in the nest 17–21 days before they fledge.

Remove bluebird nests and those of other birds as soon as the young birds have fledged. Brushing out the box and scraping off the guano is all that is necessary.

If bluebirds are not common in your area, it may take them a few seasons to find your new box. Bluebirds generally return to the same area each year.

Bluebird trails have been an extremely effective method of reestablishing the bluebird populations across North America.

*Adapted from Eastern Bluebird, from the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department and Getting Started with Bluebirds from the North American Bluebird Society.*

### Other Updates

We encourage our members to thoughtfully get involved with the VT Department of Fish and Wildlife on issues of concern. Coming up shortly are the virtual public hearings for Deer and Moose in late March, with public comment period. The Fish and Wildlife Board is also taking comments on the proposed changes to fishing management rule, and proposed 2021-2022 Migratory Game Bird Seasons.

More at <https://vtfishandwildlife.com/>.  
Make sure your voice is heard!

#### MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

(Please print) Date \_\_\_\_\_

Enclosed is \$ \_\_\_\_\_ for my ☐ New ☐ Renewal Membership

**Annual Membership: \$10.00**

Last Name \_\_\_\_\_ First Name \_\_\_\_\_

Family Members \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/Town \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone (Very important) \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

PLEASE RETURN THIS PORTION

#### VERMONT FISH AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION GROUP



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Renewal Date \_\_\_\_\_

**MEMBER**

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