



## Friends of Green River Reservoir

**Fall 2019  
Newsletter**

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# Return of the Bald Eagle

**BY RON KELLEY**

**B**ald Eagle populations declined nationwide in the 20th century due to loss of habitat and the eggshell thinning effects of DDT. Audubon Vermont and Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department began working together to reintroduce them in 2004 and released 29 eagles in Addison County between then and 2006. The first nesting pair was recorded in 2008 and numbers have been steadily increasing since then. This year a record high 36 breeding pairs were recorded compared to 26 pairs in 2018. At least 27 pairs fledged a minimum of 47 young.

I grew up in northeastern Vermont and have lived here continuously since 1974 but never saw a Bald Eagle here until about 15 years ago when my wife and I were canoeing down the Barton River to the South Bay of Lake Memphremagog. When we reached the bay, I was excited to see a mature Bald Eagle perched in the top of a nearby snag. My first Bald Eagle sighting for Green River Reser-

voir (GRR) was in 2010. I've been averaging one or two GRR eagle sightings per year since then until this year, when that number increased to seven. Sheila Goss, another FGRR board member, does a lot of paddling on the reservoir as well as many other lakes and ponds in north-central Vermont. This year she counted 21 eagle sightings on ten lakes compared to eight sightings on seven lakes in 2018. So, our experience this year certainly mimics the statewide upward trend.

Bald Eagles typically mate for life and construct their large stick nests in the tops of large trees. They lay one to three eggs, which hatch in about 35 days. They start flying within three months but take five years to become adults and have an average life span of 20 to 30 years. They go through different plumage stages along the way. Their initial dark eyes lighten during the first four years until they become yellow. The gray-black beak eventually becomes vibrant yellow and

*continued next page*

### **Immature Bald Eagle on fir tree.**



RON KELLEY





## Friends of Green River Reservoir, Inc.

— FALL 2019 —

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the solid white head and tail feathers appear at age five. The features of the immature pictured here indicates that it is two years old. That bird and the adult eagle were both seen next to the reservoir on the same late August day this year. It is exciting to see more Bald Eagles but the downside is that they are a threat to young loon chicks. A local kayaker actually observed a bald eagle grab one of this year's GRR loon chicks out of the water and fly off with it. I have observed that once an adult loon discovers the presence of an eagle, even if the eagle is soaring way up high above, it begins making distress calls. Known Vermont Bald Eagle nesting sites are primarily in the Champlain and Connecticut River valleys as well as a few interior lakes and ponds in northern Franklin, Orleans, and Essex Counties. With continued population growth, it may just be a matter of time before they begin nesting in this area.



RON KELLEY

The species currently remains protected under Vermont's Endangered Species Act but with the recovery so complete, the Endangered Species Committee's Scientific Advisory Group on Birds is considering recommending that the species be removed from the Endangered and Threatened Species list.

*Ron Kelley is a retired state forest entomologist who currently serves as the board's treasurer. He loves exploring nature with a camera, particularly Green River Reservoir. [ronald.kelley76@gmail.com](mailto:ronald.kelley76@gmail.com)*



Bald Eagle approaching nest

RON KELLEY



**UPDATE**

# Green River Reservoir Dam Relicensing

**SEPTEMBER 30, 2019****BY MICHAEL WICKENDEN**

In October 2018, multiple Parties filed Appeals and Cross Appeals of the Vermont Environmental Court's (EC's) September 2018 "Decision on the Merits" to the Vermont Supreme Court. As of September 30, 2019, the Vermont State Supreme Court has not released its decision. A decision is expected in the next month or two.

On September 20, The Friends of Green River Dam Subcommittee ("the Dam Subcommittee") met with representatives from Morrisville Water and Light (MWL). Craig Myotte, MWL's General Manager, spoke of MWL's continuing efforts to keep an open dialogue with interested parties. They are having ongoing conversations with the State's Agency of Natural Resources and representatives from the Governor's office.

MWL remains concerned that the Supreme Court is unlikely to alter the EC's order regarding the Green River Reservoir Dam's operating conditions, and that those

conditions will result in net yearly revenue deficits to MWL. Those deficits would negatively affect MWL's ratepayers.

The Dam Subcommittee reiterated that the Friend's primary mission is the preservation of the reservoir. To inform the dialogue with the Friends and other concerned participants, the Dam Committee urged MWL to invest in and share an independent analysis of projected net cost (operating income minus costs) that could result from implementing several possible operating scenarios that MWL staff envision as possible solutions. Those results would quantify different levels of MWL's projected annual financial shortfall, an essential starting point in a dialogue to explore financial alternatives and/or levels of annual financial support. Clearly, the financial viability of the dam is not readily apparent and may require additional support from a variety of partners and/or independent investors.







# GRR Loon Update for 2019

BY RON KELLEY

This was a good year for loon reproduction in the Park, with three of our reservoir nesting pairs, plus the Zack Woods pair, producing a total of six young. The one exception was the Access pair (closest to the launch site). As usual, they were the first to nest, doing so in late May. They have been the most successful pair in recent years, having produced at least one chick per year (average of 1.7) since they began nesting in 2010. But this year they were unsuccessful, with one of their eggs found floating in the water in late June. The northern loons nested on the southwestern side of Loon Island this year in early June and hatched two chicks in early July that survived into October. This is good news for that pair, as they have lost a lot of newborn chicks in recent years. The Merganser Inlet pair nested in the inlet in late

June. They hatched one surviving chick on July 26 and another on July 27. But the second chick was taken by a Bald Eagle, as observed by a local kayaker. The southern pair nested extremely late in early July on the larger of the two islands in the southwest bay. One of their two eggs hatched, producing one chick that has survived to date. That chick may not mature quickly enough to take flight before freeze-up. It all depends on how early the reservoir freezes over. Last year, their chick born in late July got stuck in the ice due to our early winter weather and did not survive. The Zack Woods loon pair produced their usual two surviving chicks.

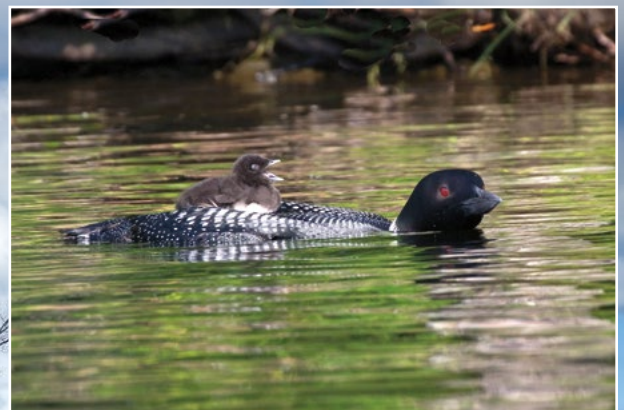
Board members Sally Laughlin, Tom Kastner, Sheila Goss, Terri Gregory, and Ron Kelley conducted the annual loon count for the reservoir on July 20. This is part of the

statewide survey coordinated by the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department and the Vermont Center for Ecostudies. We counted 15 adults and two chicks. (Two additional surviving chicks were hatched after this date.) This is one more adult than counted in 2018 and three more than in 2017.

The Vermont Center for Ecostudies' Eric Hanson reports that:

*Vermont's Common Loon nesting numbers increased in 2019 to a record 101 nesting attempts statewide. Seventy-five pairs successfully hatched 115 chicks with 87 of them surviving through August. More than 250 volunteers helped monitor and protect Vermont's loons this summer with assistance from Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department game wardens.*

PHOTOS BY RON KELLEY



Merganser Inlet





# This Past Summer at the Park

BY ROSS BRYANT, HEAD RANGER

Our goal is to “Provide an exceptional experience for our guests and staff and to remember there is always one more thing we can do.”

It has been another fun filled season of work here at Green River Reservoir State Park. This has been my seventh season in the park and my fourth season as Park Manager and each year gets better. I and the staff consider it a privilege to work in this “Magical Place.”

We have checked over 1,100 camp sites this season and in doing so the staff has paddled approximately 1,400 miles. We have also checked Zack Woods daily to assure that the four designated camp sites and the day use areas are free of trash. The low point of the season was before we opened when we cleaned up an abandoned homeless camp in Zack Woods and carried 1,900 pounds of trash to the dump. Other than that, we found almost no trash left at our camp sites and are lucky that almost all of our visitors are

aware of our “Pack it in and carry it out policy” and do practice “leave no trace camping.” As a tee-shirt I once bought says...“take only pictures and leave only footprints.”

We now have our new woodshed/storage/workshop building and we want to offer our sincere thanks to all the hard work by many people to make this happen. Other projects this summer included painting the new building and contact station, replacing multiple planks and the side rails on the ADA ramp and many small projects around the park and in Zack Woods. Our staff also picks up roadside trash between the park and Zack Woods.

The park saw approximately 14,000 visitors this season. This includes many out of state return visitors from VA, MD, PA, NC, Canada and of course the New England states. Since many of our guests come year after year, we have enjoyed watching their families grow and seeing their children return

as adults with their own children. And of course, we have also come to know their dogs and look forward to handing out treats to them.

A large variety of wildlife has been seen in the park this season including deer, a one-antlered moose, coyotes, beavers, otters, bears, snapping turtles, eagles, various hawks, and of course, the peoples’ favorite, the ever-present loons and their chicks.

The staff and I consider it a privilege to be fortunate enough to work in this wonderful setting. We are proud of our park and the guests who enjoy being here as much as we do.

We hope that the future allows us to continue to enable our guests to have an exceptional camping and paddling experience here and that future generations will continue the tradition.

In closing we want to thank the Vermont State Parks staff, the Friends of Green River and all our guests for their support through the season.





# Winter Ramblings Around the Green River Reservoir

BY SHEILA GOSS

Your canoes and kayaks have been put into storage. Hunting and foliage seasons have ended. The barren trees look cold and foreboding, as we begin to accumulate our winter's coat of white snow. Memories of watching the loons and camping on Green River Reservoir may not frequent our thoughts...but wait, the reservoir is still there! That clear and cool water may be solid, and the surrounding hills covered by deep and cold powder, but life goes on at our favorite Vermont park.

Exploring the reservoir area during winter provides an entirely new perspective, and an appreciation of the beauty that exists in our Vermont woods and lakes year round. Throw on your snowshoes or skis, and head to the park ... you can usually find more snow here than in surrounding areas! Please be careful to avoid leaving deep boot tracks, as they will freeze, and are hazardous to wildlife. We have found great snowshoeing conditions from early December until mid-April.

Look for signs and tracks left by winter residents of the park. We have

found tracks from beaver, deer, raccoon, moose, turkey, and many small mammals. Follow the tracks and see where they go! You could even find signs of otters sliding across the ice and frozen snow, or raccoons stopping for a drink in an open stream. Maybe you will get lucky and see a coyote, feeding during a January snowstorm. A great pocket tracking guide is *Mammal Tracks and Scat* by Lynn Levine.

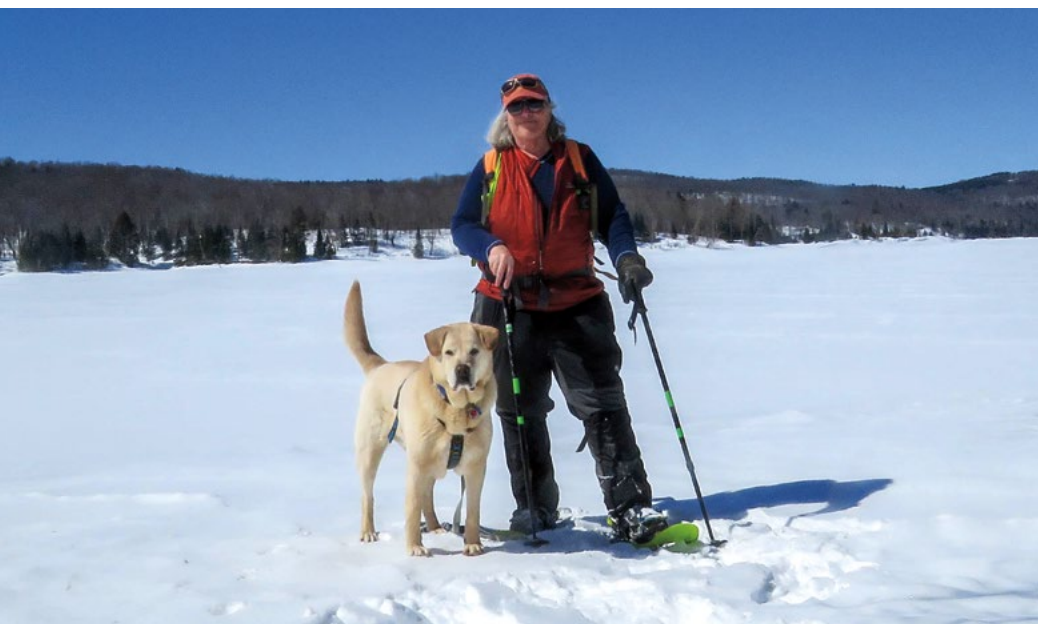
Watch for wintering birds in the trees or flying overhead; our sightings have included woodpeckers, Barred Owls, turkeys, robins, Bald Eagles, and Snow Buntings. We have spotted Great Blue Herons and ducks in early spring, perched on icy and snowy shorelines or swimming in the emerging open water. We explore the access areas and hillsides along the park, and utilize the Catamount Trail section 26, which runs along the hills on the eastern side of the reservoir. Check out [catamounttrail.org](http://catamounttrail.org) for maps and membership information.

Are you interested in frying up a pan full of perch? Being aware of state regulations, and assuring the ice is safe



and at least four inches thick, you may head out for some ice fishing. Stay away from beaver lodges and inlets; the best bet is to follow the path that others have used to access the ice. Look for places where others have cut holes; seeing signs that fish have been caught is always a good spot to start fishing. A small jig tipped with a spike or a piece of worm fished just off the bottom is a proven fish catcher.

Our beloved state park looks very different in the winter, and you will probably have it all to yourself! Though it may seem a bit disconcerting to see snow piled up to the window of the ranger station, or five feet of snow on the boardwalk, fear not ... every year, the carpet of snow dissolves, and the park returns to its verdant welcoming green. Please consider taking advantage of the winter wonderland opportunities in the park, and fully enjoy this wonderful resource we treasure.







## FGRR NEWS

### Congratulations to Eric Hanson – 2019 Winner of the GMP-Zetterstrom Environmental Award

To honor Vermonters and Vermont organizations working for endangered species, Green Mountain Power presents an annual award named for Milton resident Meeri Zetterstrom, who inspired recovery efforts that lead to the removal of the Osprey from Vermont's endangered species list. Eric Hanson, a biologist at the Vermont Center for Ecostudies (VCE) who spearheaded recovery of the formerly endangered Common Loon in Vermont, was presented the 2019 GMP-Zetterstrom Environmental Award this past summer.

Surely everyone in Vermont who cares about loons knows about the dedicated work that Eric does as leader of VCE's Vermont Loon Conservation Project, working in close cooperation with the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department, his hundreds of volunteers, lake associations, and individual property owners.

Eric's efforts over the past 21 years have included work to educate Vermonters about loons and their nesting needs, protect nest sites, assist injured and sick loons, and ultimately build a sustainable breeding population. Eric's leadership led to loons' removal from Vermont's endangered species list in 2005. Statewide, loons have rebounded from a low of only seven nesting pairs in the mid-1980s to a record 101 nesting pairs in 2019 – with 115 chicks hatched, 87 of which survived into August. More than 250 volunteers helped monitor and protect Vermont's loons this past summer.

Eric says "without question, a major reason for the successful comeback of loons in Vermont is that boaters



**Eric and Sally with their Zetterstrom Awards.**

and lakeshore owners have been made aware of what loons need, and they're eager to help. I have over 1,400 people on my contact list, including individual volunteers, lake associations, state parks, game wardens, and other groups. These people share their love of loons with thousands more than I could possibly reach."

Interestingly, FGRR Board President Sally Laughlin won the first Zetterstrom Award in 2010 for her pioneering work in restoring endangered species, during her years as Chair of the Vermont Endangered Species Committee and as director of the Vermont Institute of Natural Science during the years (1974-1992) when it led efforts to restore endangered bird species.

**FGRR NEWS****Report on Annual Meeting of the FGRR Membership**

The Annual Meeting was held 31 July at Butternut Mountain Farms in Morrisville, with a good number of members attending as well as the State Park staff. After a delicious potluck meal, the business meeting was held.

**Relicensing:** Mike Wickenden reviewed the current status of the dam relicensing, which is still under appeal at the Vermont Supreme Court.

**Park Update:** Ross Bryant, Park Manager, shared that the Park has been very busy – July was 98% booked and August is 96% reserved.

**Resolution from the Board:** *The membership passed a motion of Special Recognition to honor the work of Ross Bryant as the Park's leader for the last seven years and Park Director for the last four.*

**Year in Review:** Each Board member reviewed the projects that they have been responsible for the year including: making the reservoir more accessible for folks with disabilities, the annual lecture, the Vermont Loon watch day loon count (15 adults and 2 chicks and one nest still being incubated), and hats and t-shirts are selling well. The

forest bird monitoring project survey was completed again this June, by Liz Lackey assisted by Terri Gregory. On Vermont Center for Ecostudies' i-Naturalist, you can post observations of flora and fauna – there is a project called biodiversity of Green River Reservoir State Park. The woodshed/workshed was completed (a 5-year project in conjunction with the State).

**Board Members** Terri Gregory, Eric Nuse, and Michael Wickenden were unanimously re-elected to three-year terms ending in 2022.

**Ben Kilham on Bears**

The annual FGRR lecture on September 20, **Ben Kilham on Bears**, attracted 200 people who were fascinated by his talk and photographs. All left with a much better appreciation and understanding of the species with which we share our Vermont woodlands. Ben Kilham Ph.D. is a wildlife biologist and world recognized bear expert, who pioneered ground-breaking efforts to raise orphaned bear cubs and successfully release them back to the wild. **The Kilham Bear Center** in Lyme NH – run by Ben, his wife Debra, and sister Phoebe – is a facility which cares for orphaned cubs brought to them by NH and VT Fish and Wildlife, and prepares them for release back to the wild. Several people remarked after the talk that it was a privilege to be in the same room with such a remarkable person!



RON KELLEY

**MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS**

*Memberships run for a year from the month that you join.*

Volunteers (Board member Sheila Goss) send electronic reminders followed by a snail mail a few months before your renewal is due (and again and again, if members don't respond to the first notice). Renewing immediately saves time, energy, and stamps – we thank those that renew on the first notice!

**Please renew before the end of 2019, if you haven't already. Thank you for your support!**