



# Friends of Green River Reservoir

Fall 2020  
Newsletter

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# Protecting Green River Reservoir – a Statement from the Board

**A** bundant opportunities for outdoor activity in state parks unquestionably helped Vermonters and our visitors get through this socially-distanced summer with some semblance of sanity. Green River Reservoir is the crown jewel of our state park system, annually affording nearly sixteen thousand campers and day users a place to commune with friends, family, fish, and fowl in a wilderness-like setting a short drive from some of Vermont's most populous communities and popular tourist destinations. As a recreational resource and a critical wildlife habitat, the Green River Reservoir is one of Vermont's most valuable assets whose preservation must be a state priority.

For more than 20 years, the nonprofit Friends of the Green River Reservoir has been the leading voice for protecting the wilderness-like character and wildlife habitat of the Green River Reservoir State Park while preserving its heritage and historical uses for future generations. Our organization was instrumental in the establishment of the state park, collaborating with the Department of Forest Parks and Recreation in developing the park's Master Plan. Working with the town of Hyde Park, we helped write and implement viewshed protection standards that preserve the pristine vistas

reservoir recreationists enjoy. Our members have contributed countless hours to designing park facilities ranging from parking areas and an ADA-compliant boardwalk to the award-winning composting outhouses, and to other programs that enhance the Green River Reservoir experience.

In recent years, the Friends have vigilantly followed the process to relicense the hydroelectric dam on the Green River that created the eponymous reservoir so many Vermonters have come to love. The dam is owned and operated by Morrisville Water and Light (MWL), a municipal electric utility that has historically made important contributions to the creation of the state park and the recovery of the loon population that now call the reservoir home each year. MWL is seeking a renewal of the 40-year federal license that has governed dam operations since the last century.

MWL's renewal application triggered the state Agency of Natural Resources' obligations to establish conditions for the next 40 years of dam operation, ensuring that dam operations do not compromise water quality, aquatic habitat, and recreational opportunity downstream of the dam and in the reservoir itself. After extensive study by agency scientists and those hired by MWL, the Agency set conditions that would allow for

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## Friends of Green River Reservoir, Inc.

— FALL 2020 —

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## MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS

*Memberships run for one 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 2020 – if you haven't already. We need your support!**

## Protecting Green River Reservoir

*Continued from page 1*

the continued operation of the dam, but with restrictions on the flow of the dam and the amount of water MWL could draw down in the winter. These restrictions are intended to ensure sufficient downstream flows to support survival of native fish species and water levels needed for a healthy ecosystem in the reservoir.

MWL claims that it cannot economically operate the dam and comply with the federal Clean Water Act. MWL has spent over \$1 million on multi-year litigation, unsuccessfully appealing water quality conditions to the Vermont Supreme Court, which sided with the Agency of Natural Resources. Litigation between MWL and the State is also pending at the federal agency with final say over the Green River Dam relicensing.

Without taking sides, The Friends of Green River Reservoir have followed all the litigation closely with the help of an environmental attorney. Despite careful review of the court records and repeated requests to MWL leadership, we have yet to see an independent analysis proving that the dam cannot be operated safely and economically in harmony with the ecological standards Vermont has adopted to comply with the Clean Water Act, while also maintaining the reservoir as a recreational

resource for boaters, birdwatchers, anglers, swimmers, and campers.

Without objective information shared by MWL with all stakeholders, we can neither completely credit nor discount MWL's worst-case scenario predictions for the reservoir's future. The Friends have urged MWL's leadership to be transparent with the economic data upon which their claims of potential long-term operational losses are based. Our offer to financially assist MWL in development of independent data to inform stakeholder dialogue on the reservoir's future remains on the table.

What we do know, however, is that MWL does not enjoy the unilateral authority to drain the reservoir. That drastic action would require further regulatory approval from state and federal regulators after an expensive multi-year process. In short, the near-term preservation of the reservoir is assured.

Once the dust settles on dam relicensing, however, all interested parties should come to the table around the shared goal of preserving the Green River Reservoir State Park for the next forty years and beyond. The Friends of the Green River Reservoir can be counted on as a leading, collaborative voice in that discussion.

*See the FGRR website for more information –*

[www.fgrrvt.org/news-events](http://www.fgrrvt.org/news-events)

RON KELLEY





# Update from the FGRR Dam Committee

BY MICHAEL WICKENDEN

The Friends of Green River Reservoir Board continues to closely monitor the status of the ongoing legal petitions regarding the Green River Reservoir Dam FERC relicensing. A July 2020 timeline and summary of recent legal activity can be found at the Friends' website (<http://www.fgrrvt.org/news-events>). As of October 7, 2020, there have been no changes in that status.

In addition to this legal monitoring, the Board has reached out to the new Morrisville Water and Light (MWL)

Manager, Penny Jones. We will be meeting with Penny and MWL staff to get an update on the status of their relicensing efforts, ongoing communication with members of VT's political leadership, and what future alternatives they are exploring. In addition, we are meeting with our legal consultant, Anthony Iarrapino, Esq. to gain a more in-depth understanding of MWL's future options and potential outcomes, and to ensure the long-term viability of the Green River Reservoir State Park.

## Loon Update for 2020

BY RON KELLEY

This was a low year for loon reproduction at Green River Reservoir. Maybe we can't blame the Covid-19 Pandemic but only two of the four territorial pairs of loons nested this year while the other two kept socially distant from one another. The Access Bay pair nested about when they always have, in late May. They produced one chick that survived into September. The Northwest (Loon Island) pair nested on their island about July 3, which was extremely late for them. That nest failed to produce any chicks. But the Zack Woods pair produced two chicks that survived into September, bringing the total to three for the state park.

Green River Reservoir remains the only body of water in the state (including Lake Champlain) with four pairs of nesting loons. The Northwest loons have been nesting there since at least 1978. By 1983, there were only six additional nesting pairs of loons left in the state and the species was listed as Endangered. But with the establishment of the Vermont Loon Recovery Project (now the Loon Conservation

Project) in 1977, now a joint effort between the Vermont Center for Ecosystems and the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department, loon populations have been increasing ever since. Loons were removed from Vermont's Endangered and Threatened Species list in 2005.

As for the reservoir, loon reproduction has ranged from one to four chicks per year over the past ten years and has averaged three chicks per year. 2013 was the last time there was only one surviving chick. Adult counts have also increased over that time period. In 2017, our Board took over the responsibility of doing the annual July loon count there. We counted 12 adults in 2017, 14 in 2018, 15 in 2019 and 17 this past summer. One loon pair nested on nearby Collins Pond this year for the first time ever, perhaps due to overcrowding on Green River Reservoir. Their nest failed to produce any chicks but that is not uncommon for loon newlyweds. And this was a very successful year for other Vermont locations. Statewide, 95 nests were established, producing at least 73 chicks that survived through August, only slightly

below last year's record numbers. The two most successful GRR pairs (the NW and Access Bay Pairs) have averaged 1 and 1.5 chicks respectively over the past ten years.

According to the VCE website, Vermont loons produce chicks at one of the highest rates in New England – 0.70 chicks per territorial pair over a 10-year period. The North American average is 0.52 chicks per territorial pair. The Vermont rate may be starting to slow, however, as loons now begin to move into more marginal breeding territories and competition increases. <https://vtecostudies.org/projects/lakes-ponds/common-loon-conservation/vermont-loon-conservation-project/>



BOB MALBON





2020 SEASON REVIEW

# Green River Reservoir State Park

BY ROSS BRYANT, GRRSP MANAGER

**I**t has been a challenging year, but “We Did It.”

This has been a strange and busy year with many operational changes due to Covid-19. The park had 98% occupancy for campers for the season. This year we had the highest occupancy for both campers and day users ever.

Our staff cleaned over 1200 sites on the reservoir and to accomplish this we paddled around 1200 miles. We have also been busy with many projects including flipping toilets, moving toilet stairs and replacing boards on the ADA path. We also checked Zack Woods daily. The Vermont Youth Conservation Corps added a second composting toilet site in Zack Woods and a third one is planned; once the third one is complete all camping sites there will have access to a composting toilet site.

We had a 98% occupancy rate for campsites this year and 2021 is already 55% reserved. The big months at this time for next season are July at 85% and August at 77% reserved.

We want to take this opportunity to thank The Friends of Green River for purchasing us a set of battery power tools this season. Those tools certainly made completing some of our projects this summer much easier.

We had almost 16,000 visitors this summer. Many of these are old friends, along with many who were first time users. It is always nice to see our returning families, many of whom first came here as kids, and now come with their children. It was also fun to introduce our first-time guests to this special place and I’m sure we will see many of them again in the future. We have missed seeing some of our past campers

that were unable to come because of Covid-19 restrictions; however, many of them called and said they hope to see us next year. Zack Woods also experienced a large increase in campers this season.

A large variety of wildlife was seen in the park this summer. Visitors and staff reported bear, deer, moose, raccoons, otters, coyotes, beaver, turtles, eagles, various hawks and of course, the guest favorites, the ever-present loons.

The staff and I consider it a privilege to be able to work in this magical place. We are proud of our park and the guests who enjoy being here with us.

In closing we want to thank the Friends of Green River, the Vermont State Parks Staff, and all of our guests for their support this weird yet wonderful season.





# Nature Notes

PHOTOS AND TEXT BY SHEILA GOSS AND LISA DIMONDSTEIN

The 2020 season at Green River Reservoir has been unlike any other ... uncertainty, new restrictions, and community concerns have challenged us all. Many of us have been soothed by the presence of our iconic loons, Bald Eagles, and the many warblers, sparrows, ducks and the other birds that frequent the reservoir.

It is always interesting to note the more unusual, or rare sightings that occur in our biologically diverse reservoir area. This past summer, Lisa Dimondstein and Sheila Goss of our board of directors reported some fascinating wildlife sightings.

- While paddling up the northern arm of the reservoir, searching for the immature Bald Eagle that had been sighted in that area, Lisa was surprised by a crashing noise in the marshy area. She soon had a large moose accompanying her as she paddled! The moose was rather oblivious to Lisa's paddling along in her kayak and posed nicely for some fascinating photos! After posting her photos on our Facebook page, Lisa learned that another paddler had seen a moose cow with a calf in the same area.

- Early one morning in July, Sheila was canoeing out to her campsite, when she spotted a young black bear standing on a log at the edge of the shoreline in the southeast corner of the reservoir. The bear was a little shy and ambled up into the high grass and towards his woods.
- Lisa also made a neat discovery, observing some magnificent bryozoan in the reservoir waters by site 12. How many of us have paddled by these formations, not knowing of their presence in our waters? These freshwater bryozoans are small animals that live together in colonies that appear as large gelatinous masses. But fear not, these odd-looking blobs are signs of a healthy lake! They can help with nutrient cycling and also serve as food for fish.

- While paddling in September, Sheila observed a solitary bird swimming near Merganser Inlet. The bird was swimming as gulls do, with its butt high in the water, but this bird had different coloration than that of the ringed-bill gulls that we see locally. What was most striking were the bird's bright blue legs! After returning home from her camping outing, Sheila did some research and discovered that this was a juvenile Long-tailed Jaeger, an arctic species who migrates to the ocean in the fall. According to local bird experts, this is the first reported sighting of such a bird in Central Vermont.

Who knows what we will see on the reservoir before the 2020 season finally ends? Migratory birds may stop by for a visit, and moose, bear, and deer may wander along the quieter late fall shorelines. Keep your eyes and ears open, since the reservoir never ceases to provide amazing wildlife watching opportunities.



Magnificent Bryozoan



Moose



Long-tailed Jaeger





## FGRR ANNUAL NATURE PROGRAM

# Loon Talk by Eric Hanson

### PRESENTATION BY ZOOM

Friday 13 November 2020 • 7:00 PM

Register by emailing us at [webmaster@fgrrvt.org](mailto:webmaster@fgrrvt.org)

Eric Hanson of the Vermont Center for Ecostudies will present a webinar focused on loon conservation in Vermont and loon behavior. Eric will share details on the loons of Green River Reservoir, telling why it is such a hotbed for loon activity. He will give an overview of Vermont loon conservation activities, explain the important role of nest warning signs and rafts. He will also discuss his 30 years of rescue attempts of birds in distress, and a recent analysis of what's killing our loons based on necropsy studies with Tufts Wildlife Veterinary School.

Common Loons are unique in that we can watch their interactions with each other during daylight hours. Eric will go over the results of Dr. Walter Piper's 25 years of banding research in Wisconsin, detail what is happening during loon territorial interactions, when and where chicks return, and much more.

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. His leadership led to the the the 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 in 2019 a record 101 nesting pairs which successfully hatched 115 chicks with 87 of them surviving through August.

