



Judy Preston



EAST CREEK NATURAL AREA

For the last four miles before it enters Lake Champlain at Mt. Independence, East Creek is undeveloped, flanked only by the wetlands, forests, and farm fields that have characterized and shaped this area for two hundred years. The East Creek marsh, located near the mouth of the stream, contains one of the largest stands of narrow-leaved cattail in Vermont and provides critical fish spawning habitat and a haven for nesting waterfowl.



Arrowhead (also known as duck potato because ducks and muskrats eat its starchy tubers), pickerelweed, and wild rice are common aquatic plants in the marsh. It's possible to see the purple spiky flowers of the pickerelweed blooming in mass profusion along the creek much of the summer. Other common aquatic or semi-aquatic plants found here include: burreed, pondweed, duckweed, bladderwort, yellow pond lily, coontail, water plantain, and scented white water lily. At the confluence of the main creek and the north fork is a prime example of the floodplain forests that once dominated riparian areas in the Champlain Valley.

Water birds such as American bittern, Virginia rail, marsh wren, and swamp sparrow feed along East Creek, especially in the marsh area. Predatory birds like osprey, marsh hawks, and bald eagles, though rare, regularly soar above the creek in search of a meal. Other common birds seen here include the tree swallow, mourning dove, kestrel, common crow, gray catbird, American goldfinch, killdeer, white-breasted nuthatch, eastern kingbird, and cedar waxwing.

Muskrats build houses out of the narrow-leaved cattails along the upper portions of the creek while mink cruise the banks for food and other mammals such as coyotes, bobcats, white tailed deer, and shrews inhabit the uplands. Painted turtles often sun themselves on shore. Their cousins, the snapping turtles, probe the depths of the creek and prey on unsuspecting ducklings.

Many fish species live in East Creek, including several rare species like the blackchin shiner and bridle shiner, in addition to other species such as golden shiner, bullhead, rock bass, chub, and yellow perch. When water levels are high in the spring, long-nosed gar spawn in the creek.

Humans have been living in the vicinity of East Creek for many hundreds of years, from the Red Paint people to the Algonquin and the Iroquois, whose pottery and arrowheads have been found at the mouth of East Creek, to European settlers. Historically, local farmers have relied upon many aspects of the creek for their livelihood: water for families and livestock, cattails for bedding material, and marshes that were mowed for hay during late summer. More recently, the Conservancy has been working with farmers and others to create herbaceous and forested buffers along East Creek to reduce the erosion of riverbanks caused by the feet of cattle and nutrient loading resulting from the run off of fertilizer from fields.



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Arrowhead

The Conservancy has been working with partners to protect the East Creek Natural Area since 1989 and has conserved a total of 2,198 acres through the purchase of land and easements. Many other organizations have been at work in the area, which makes the total number of protected acres along East Creek much higher. The State of Vermont's 398-acre East Creek Wildlife Management Area and the Mount Independence State Historic Site are two of these additional protected areas.

East Creek is a great place to go canoeing. In fact, the best access to the natural area is by canoe via Lake Champlain. The canoe trip on the lake to and from the creek can be difficult, especially if there are boat wakes on the lake or if the wind is up, but canoeing gets easier on East Creek itself.

Driving Directions

There are two access points to East Creek from Lake Champlain: Buoy 39 Marina, south of East Creek, and Larabee Point Fish and Game access, north of the creek. The marina is privately owned and there is a fee for launching your boat there.

To Buoy 39 Marina: Take Route 22A to Orwell. Follow Route 73 west to the "Y" to Mount Independence Road. Buoy 39 Marina is at the end of Mount Independence Road. From here it's a 1.25-mile, approximately half-hour paddle north on Lake Champlain to East Creek.

To Larabee Point Fish and Game Access: From Orwell, follow Route 73 west and then north to Hough Crossing. Go about three more miles to just south of the ferry crossing. It's a one-mile, approximately half-hour paddle south on Lake Champlain to East Creek.