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Over the next many issues of the Oak Log, we will bring you profiles of our visitable preserves in Vermont. You may also download these profiles or a copy of our preserve guide from our website at [nature.org/vermont](http://nature.org/vermont). We invite you to visit and enjoy.

## LAPLATTE RIVER MARSH NATURAL AREA



Every acre counts in this rivershore natural area, an oasis of nature in an otherwise fragmented landscape. An important habitat for migratory waterfowl, this marsh complex is located at the end of the LaPlatte, a river that extends 16 miles from Lake Iroquois to Lake Champlain and drains 34,137 acres of Champlain lowlands. Nearly 150 acres in size, the marsh is regularly flooded when the lake level rises and is inhabited by plant species that can endure these wet conditions. The Conservancy owns over 200 acres of marsh, and has protected several acres by conservation easement.

Excellent examples of floodplain forest and deepwater marsh, natural community types that are becoming increasingly rare as agriculture and development transform the landscape, are the centerpiece of this preserve. The moist soil of the bottomland is ideal for floodplain forests, and for tree species like black willow, green ash, and silver maple that thrive on the annual spring floods along the river. Broad-fruited burreed, common cattail, common arrowhead, and river bulrush thrive in the wetlands. On the moist clay soils above the level of annual flooding is an example of the rare valley clayplain forest. Stands of white pine, eastern hemlock, and eastern red cedar are found in the uplands.

Several rare plant species are found in the LaPlatte River Marsh Natural Area, and this stretch of the LaPlatte River is the only Vermont site for the stonecat, Vermont's rarest catfish. The endangered channel darter, another type of fish, also lives in the lower portion of the LaPlatte River.

The LaPlatte is a good place to see great blue herons, black-crowned night herons, and several kinds of ducks. Birds like the woodcock, gray catbird, song sparrow, ruffed grouse and common yellowthroat frequent the LaPlatte River Marsh. Beavers are also a common sight and have visibly changed the look of the marsh over time.

Like many places around the state, the LaPlatte River Marsh is troubled by exotic invasive species, like buckthorn and others, but Conservancy staff and volunteers are working hard to fight these invaders. Beyond the veil of invasives that trouble the edges of the plant communities here, the LaPlatte Rivershore Natural Area is a place of unquestionable age and majesty. In the fall, the mature forest of the interior fills with mushrooms and the mosquitoes vacate the marsh. "It becomes a tranquil place where it's easy to feel very far from the modern world," says Rose Paul, Director of Science and Stewardship at the Conservancy.

### Driving Directions

This natural area can be enjoyed on foot or by canoe or kayak. From I-89, take exit 13 to I-189 to South Burlington and Route 7. Turn left (south) on Route 7 and travel approximately 3 miles. Turn right (west) on Bay Road at a stoplight. From there, it's about one mile to the natural area and the mouth of the LaPlatte River. Go under a railroad overpass and across a small bridge. Directly to the right will be the Shelburne Bay fishing access. You can park here. The natural area is directly across the road from the fishing access.

