



Citizen Science Brings Vermont Loons Back from the Brink

Vermont Center for Ecostudies – Vermont Loon Recovery Project

“Uniting People and Science for Conservation” is the motto of the Vermont Center for Ecostudies (VCE). One way in which the organization accomplishes this goal is through citizen science, which partners VCE biologists with volunteer observers to answer research questions. The Vermont Loon Recovery Program (VLRP) is one VCE project that relies on its volunteers to protect a species that almost disappeared from the lakes and ponds in Vermont’s Northeast Kingdom and elsewhere around the state.

VLRP began in 1977 when fewer than 20 nesting Common Loons could be found in Vermont. In 1983, the situation became even more dire when only 7 pairs attempted to nest. While the world population of loons has remained healthy over the years, the Vermont population became so low that in 1987 the bird was put on Vermont’s Endangered Species List, and a seasonal biologist was hired to revive the population. Since 1998, that biologist has been Eric Hanson, and thanks to his efforts and those of the volunteers he coordinates, today there are over 200 loons in Vermont compared to 29 individuals in 1983.

By monitoring the loons, educating the public through outreach activities, and management techniques like placing nesting rafts on lakes, VLRP volunteers have helped loons in Vermont to rebound. Hanson says, “I’ve really been into getting the volunteers to feel empowered. There are some lakes that I don’t even visit anymore, because the volunteers there have such a good handle on things.” Today, the project has around 250 volunteers. Thankfully, their work will continue to keep an iconic northern species on Vermont lakes for generations to come.



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Partnerships are Key to Land Conservation

Nulhegan Basin – Land Conservation

For those who enjoy outdoor recreation like hunting, fishing, hiking, cross country skiing and wildlife photography, few areas of Vermont have as much to offer as the Northeast Kingdom. Particularly, the Silvio O. Conte National Wildlife Refuge is a place to enjoy an abundance of wildlife, and thanks to a collaboration with the Conservation Fund, the refuge now includes the 26,000 acre Nulhegan Basin Unit.

In 1998, the Conservation Fund worked with private, public and non-profit partners to protect 300,000 acres of land in New York, Vermont and New Hampshire. It was the largest multi-state conservation project in U.S. history. Nearly half of the land, 130,000 acres in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont, was purchased from the paper company, Champion International. Nancy Bell, the Conservation Fund’s Vermont Representative, explains that “some of that land now is managed for wildlife, some is unmanaged and a large amount of it is used as a working forest.” 26,000 of those acres were used to create the Nulhegan Basin Unit of the Silvio O. Conte National Wildlife Refuge. This significant wetland contains miles of river frontage, important deer wintering areas, a healthy population of moose and countless recreation opportunities that contribute to the economic base of the local communities.

Bell is quick to point out that while the acquisition of the Champion lands was an important piece of land conservation, countless land trusts throughout the state are doing similar work on a smaller scale, partnering to conserve land.

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