

Halfmoon Cove Wildlife Management Area

General Description

Halfmoon Cove Wildlife Management Area (WMA) is located in the town of Colchester. This WMA is a mix of floodplain forest and emergent marsh framing an oxbow of the Winooski River. Its 294 acres stretch along the eastern/northern bank of the river west of Route 127. There is a parking lot and small boat access for the Winooski River on the west side of Route 127, just north of the Heineberg Bridge. There is limited parking at the end of Holbrook Court which provides foot access down a steep bank to the cove itself. Hunting and trapping are allowed. Firearms are restricted to shotgun only by the town of Colchester.

History

The Winooski River, like the other major rivers feeding into Lake Champlain, saw much Native American activity. There were permanent settlements on its banks, where tribes grew corn, beans and squash. Butternuts were harvested in the woods. There was also excellent fishing, including landlocked salmon. The word "Winooski" means "onion," and refers to the wild onions that once were abundant along the river's banks. European settlers found this area to be one of the most attractive areas on the shores of Lake Champlain, which has resulted in the Winooski Valley being the most heavily developed area in all Vermont. Halfmoon Cove is a small wedge of undeveloped land in this human-dominated landscape. Since it sits in a trough below high banks, it has a remarkably remote feeling.

Several funding sources were combined to acquire the WMA. These were the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, North American Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Vermont Fish & Wildlife Department license monies and Duck Stamp funds, Ducks Unlimited, The Nature Conservancy and private contributions.

Habitat Features

Halfmoon Cove itself is an oxbow of the Winooski River, which is now completely cut off from the river. As a result, it is now filling in with mats of cattails and other emergent vegetation. Between the cove and the river are silver maple-sensitive fern and silver maple-ostrich fern riverine floodplain forests. There is an alder swamp and shallow emergent marsh.

This sheltered cove and its surrounding woodland are surprisingly pristine, considering they are so near urban development. Common tree species are red oak, red maple, white pine, red and white cedars, cottonwood, pitch pine and willow species. There are many snags that are useful to cavity-nesting birds and birds that eat insects living in dead trees. Common wetland plants include water lily, duckweed, cattail and wild rice. Some unusual plants found in the cove are cursed crowfoot, white adder's mouth and nodding trillium.

Common Fish and Wildlife

Mammals You may encounter white-tailed deer, beaver, muskrat, mink, otter and raccoon in the cove and woodlands.

Birds Several duck species inhabit the marsh, including black and wood ducks, mallards, blue-winged teal and hooded mergansers. Woodcock may be found in the woods. There is excellent birding for marsh-dwelling birds such as bitterns, herons, rails, coots and marsh wrens. A number of songbirds nest in the woodlands, some of which forage in the marsh. Woodpeckers nest in and forage on plentiful snags. Ospreys sometimes pass overhead; they might be seen fishing in the river.

Reptiles and Amphibians This is good habitat for several herptiles, including mudpuppy, northern two-lined salamander, newt, spring peeper, bullfrog, and green, pickerel, northern leopard and wood frogs. Reptiles that might be encountered are stinkpot, snapping, painted, wood and northern map turtles, and brown, northern water and garter snakes. It is possible the eastern ribbon snake may occur here as well.

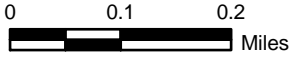
Fish One can fish in the cove itself, or in the Winooski River which supports a more diverse fishery. Expect to catch chain pickerel, largemouth and smallmouth bass, northern pike, walleye, brown bullhead, yellow and white perch, carp, pumpkinseed and crappie in the river.



Halfmoon Cove is a slice of wildland near suburban Colchester. Bill Crenshaw, VFWD photo.

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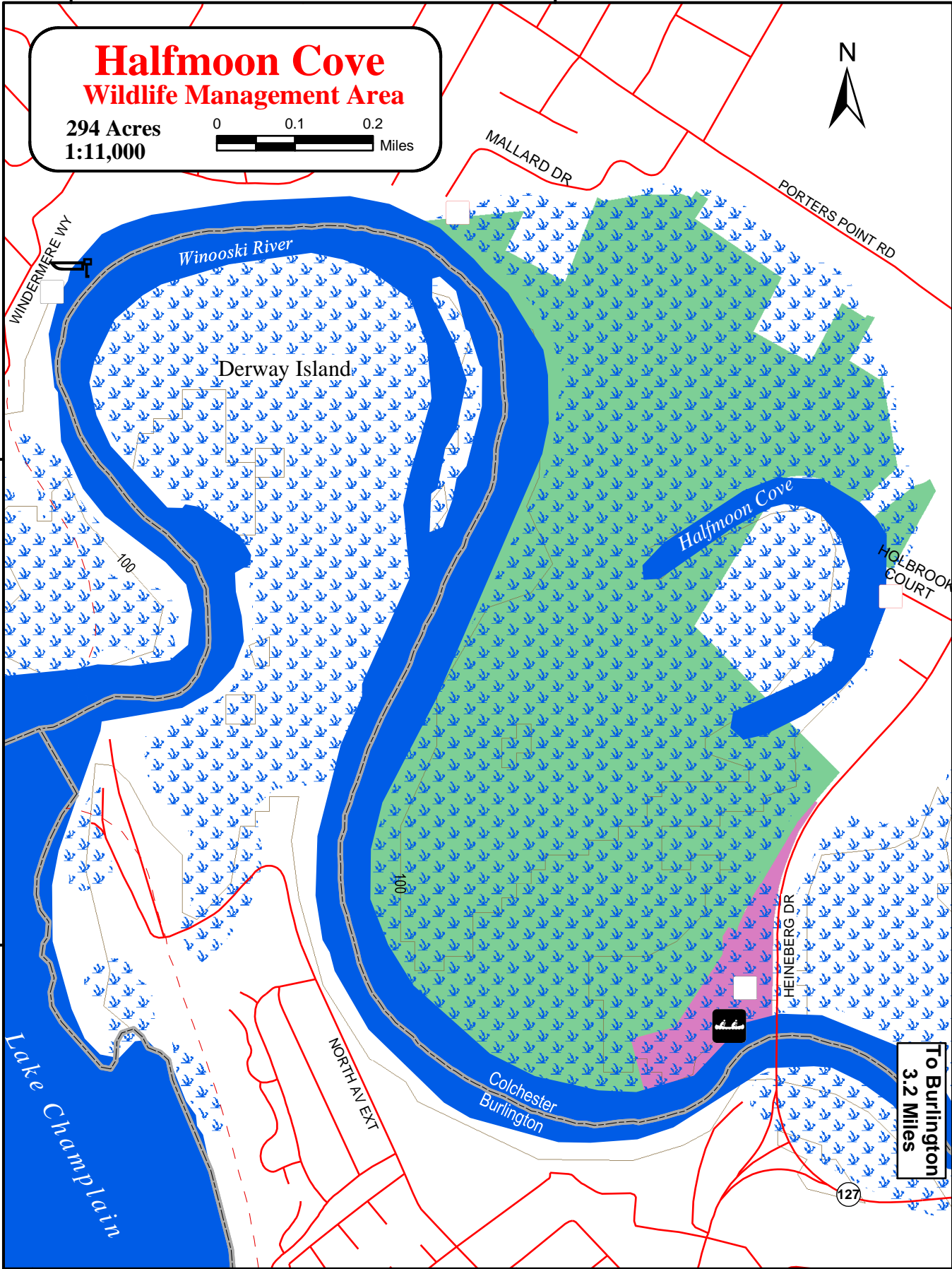
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