



The Stanley J. Hamlin Marsh Wildlife Management Area (formerly called the Clay Marsh Wildlife Management Area) is located in the Town of Clay northwest of North Syracuse in Onondaga County. The area is easily reachable from Interstate 481 via Henry Clay Blvd., from State Route 11 via Bear Road; and from Wetzel Road for the west and southwest portions of the area. The 7 ½ minute topographic map covering the area is Brewerton.

Hamlin Marsh is 1,686 acres, with about 88% of it in wetland habitat. The Wildlife Management Area (WMA) is about four miles long and from ¼ to one mile wide. Mud Creek flows into and out of Hamlin Marsh WMA and drops only about 2.4 feet as it travels through the marsh. Mill Creek flows into the marsh from the south side under Bear Road. Area topography is gently rolling land with an average elevation of about 400 feet above sea level.

Hamlin Marsh WMA was at one time the basin of post-glacial Lake Iroquois whose water level was about 70 feet above the present marsh. Poor drainage and the relatively shallow depth of water have favored the development of wetland vegetation. The organic soils created from dying wetland vegetation are over 25 feet deep in places. The marsh appears to have become wetter since the 1940s. Part of this is due to increasing human development around the wetland, causing more frequent and faster water runoff into the marsh and partly due to dams downstream of the marsh.

The marsh contains the largest, yet unstable, cattail stand in Onondaga County. Cattails increase in some areas of the marsh while decreasing in other areas. Other vegetation includes: arrow arum, arrowhead, water lily, smart weed, burr-reed, purple loosestrife (an exotic invader), swamp loosestrife, button bush, alder, willow, red maple, ashes, hickories, tulip trees and oaks. Phragmites, or common reed, is another exotic invader showing a scattered presence.

The upland areas adjacent to the marsh, including old fields and woods, and the emergent and submergent aquatic vegetation in the wetland provide many types of habitat for wildlife. The area provides breeding, nesting, resting and feeding opportunities for almost two hundred species of birds. Careful observation will show pickerel frog, wood frog, snapping turtle, spotted turtle, garter snake, star-nosed mole, muskrat, beaver, mink, fox, raccoon and white-tailed deer.

Hamlin Marsh was referred to as Clay Marsh, Cicero Swamp, Little Cicero Swamp and Peat Swamp in the past. In 1994 it was renamed the Stanley J. Hamlin Marsh WMA after a local prominent conservationist who was instrumental in the State's acquisition of the area.

The Town of Clay was settled by Europeans in the very early 1800s. Early settlers cleared the heavy growth of hemlock, beech, birch, pine and maple for farming. In 1871 the Syracuse Northern Railroad (now Conrail) was built across the marsh. Numerous fires caused by sparks from trains burned ten to twenty-foot holes in the organic substrate. In the mid-1870s peat was mined just to the east of the Conrail tracks and south of Mud Creek. Today the mine appears to be an open pond. The peat was transported to fields south of the peat mine (now a Clay Town Park) for drying and then sold as fuel. From 1913 through at least 1921, onion and carrot farming along the north side of Henry Clay Blvd. and west of the railroad was a main activity and livelihood for the Euclid area. These old farm fields are now under four to six feet of water and cattails. An old farm road running north and south a half mile west of Davis Road, marked by a line of willows, is also under water. From the early 1900s through the mid-1960s local residents contributed to their income by trapping muskrats. Records show up to 100 muskrats taken by one trapper in a day.

New York State began purchasing the Hamlin Marsh WMA in 1975 with monies derived from the Environmental Bond Act. In short, these goals are to protect, maintain and perpetuate the natural resource environment within the Area while permitting related recreational uses compatible with the resources including wildlife.

Management and maintenance activities are carried out with monies derived mainly from hunting license fees and Federal taxes on sporting arms and ammunition. These monies are channeled through the Conservation Fund, a dedicated fund for fish and wildlife activities. Examples of management and maintenance include parking area construction and maintenance, boundary line maintenance, information signs, mowing, and wood duck box erection.

In 1994 a major project funded by a partnership consisting of Ducks Unlimited, Wildfowlers of Central New York, the Army Corps of Engineers-Buffalo District and the Conservation Fund was completed to provide public non-motorized boat access into the marsh as well as increased nesting and open water habitat. The

\$100,000 project created 4.9 miles of channel, over 200 nesting islands and about 11 acres of open water. The channels are a minimum of 25 feet wide and an average of four feet deep although some portions are up to ten feet deep. The main channel (accessible from the Davis Road parking area) from Davis Road to the Conrail Railroad is 3.1 miles long. A 30-yard portage over a "plug" left in the channel is necessary.

The 0.7-mile Mill Creek channel is accessible from the Bear Road parking area and meets the main channel about 0.9 mile west of Davis Road. There is not a recognizable channel west of the railroad tracks. Caution is advised if foot travel is undertaken because of the soft bottom and hidden holes within the marsh.

Activities compatible with the objectives for the management area include: hunting, trapping and fishing under statewide regulations, non-motorized boating, photography, hiking, and wildlife observation. There also is an accessible duck blind for hunting and wildlife viewing Off of Old Wetzel Rd. Hunting usually occurs from September through February.

Since Hamlin Marsh is a Wildlife Management Area, activities not compatible with the Area are prohibited. Prohibited activities include (but are not limited to) swimming, overnight storage of personal property, and any use of motorized vehicles (including cars, travel trailers/RVs, snowmobiles, ATVs, etc.) on terrain other than a maintained public road. Permanent manmade structures of any kind are prohibited. Climbing on or using the nesting islands during the spring months is prohibited.

Special note should be made that the Conrail Railroad is private property and not part of the wildlife management area.

The Stanley J. Hamlin Marsh Wildlife Management Area is open to the general public year round.

**For more information call or write to:**

Wildlife Manager  
NYSDEC Bureau of Wildlife  
1285 Fisher Avenue  
Cortland, NY 13045  
607-753-3095 ext. 247

## Stanley J. Hamlin Marsh Wildlife Management Area



**New York State Department of  
Environmental Conservation**