

TONAWANDA WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA

BY HEIDI KENNEDY

Located midway between Buffalo and Rochester is an almost 20,000-acre complex of state and federal conserved habitat that is comprised of two Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) and the Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge. The western-most portion of this complex is the 5,643-acre Tonawanda WMA. It has a lot to offer outdoor enthusiasts and is a popular destination for hunting, trapping, recreation, and wildlife observation.

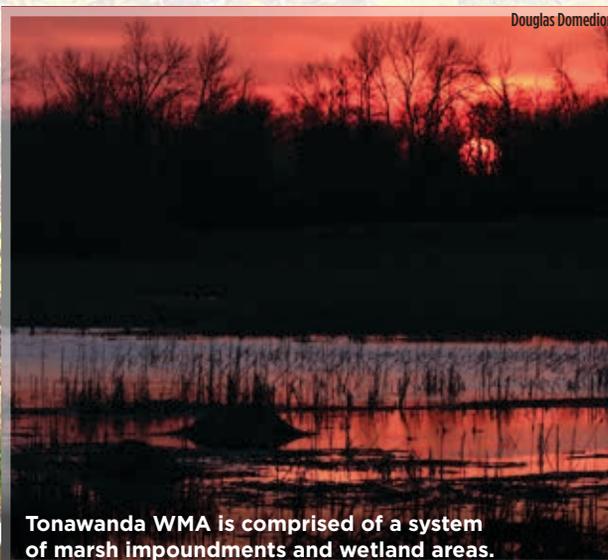
Tonawanda WMA consists primarily of marsh impoundments and other wetland areas, but it also includes large grasslands and forested areas. With its extensive system of marshes, the WMA is an important migratory stopover for waterfowl and other wetland-dependent birds in the Atlantic Flyway, and many wetland-dependent wildlife species breed there. Several endangered and threatened species, species of special concern, and species of greatest conservation need (SGCN) use the various habitats in the complex. The area has been designated an Important Bird Area by Audubon, and is also a designated NYS Bird Conservation Area.

Within Tonawanda WMA's system of marsh impoundments, habitat is manipulated by moving water through a series of control boxes to adjust water levels and

conduct drawdowns and reflooding of marshes. A marsh drawdown is when water is slowly removed from a marsh to expose the soil. DEC conducts marsh drawdowns to provide aquatic food plants for wildlife—primarily migrating waterfowl—and to stimulate emergent vegetation if a marsh has become too open. In the late summer and fall, if water is available, the marshes are reflooded.

Tonawanda WMA provides great opportunities to view a variety of migrating waterfowl, songbirds, shorebirds, marsh birds, and raptors. Waterfowl migration, which is a popular attraction, peaks in the spring, in late March and early April. In the fall, migrating waterfowl can be seen over a longer period, but activity often peaks in October. During the late summer and fall, great egrets feed and roost in the WMA.

The area provides breeding habitat for multiple species of waterfowl, including wood ducks, mallards, and hooded mergansers. DEC wildlife staff maintain wood duck boxes and mallard nesting structures to increase nesting success for these species. Several New York state-listed species also nest on Tonawanda WMA; the complex is one of only a handful of locations in New York where the state-endangered black



tern still nests. Other listed marsh birds nesting in the area include least bittern, pied-billed grebe, and American bittern. Bald eagles, osprey, and protonotary warbler (a high priority SGCN), also nest here.

Grasslands adjacent to wetlands offer nesting habitat for waterfowl, and larger fields provide habitat for grassland-nesting bird species, such as sedge wren and Northern harrier. During the winter months, the grasslands and emergent wetlands provide cover and foraging habitat for a variety of species, including Northern harrier and short-eared owl. In addition to birds, the area provides habitat for a variety of mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and fish. Muskrats are an important part of the marsh ecosystem in the WMA—keep an eye out for their houses made of mud and cattails.

Waterfowl hunting is an especially popular activity in this WMA, and waterfowl hunters are always encouraged to scout ahead of time because conditions in marshes change from year to year. The area also provides opportunities for quality upland game hunting for species such as white-tailed deer and wild turkey, and DEC releases ring-necked pheasants in grassland fields in the area. Trapping, especially for muskrat, is also a popular activity.

With its diverse habitats, abundant wildlife, and varied recreational opportunities, Tonawanda WMA and the surrounding complex is a must-visit destination for outdoor enthusiasts.

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LOCATED IN the Town of Shelby, Orleans County; Town of Newstead, Erie County; Town of Royalton, Niagara County; and Town of Alabama, Genesee County

SIZE: 5,643 acres



Site Features



NOTES: Open year-round. However, portions of the WMA may be closed to the public during certain times of the year to protect sensitive species. Special regulations apply to some activities, including hunting and trapping. For more information, visit www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/24442.html.



ACCESSIBLE FEATURES: There are multiple parking areas, viewing areas, overlooks, trails, and kiosks. An accessible waterfowl hunting blind, at the end of a short trail, is available by permit for seniors and people with disabilities.



HUNTING: Permits are required to hunt waterfowl the first weekend of duck season. No waterfowl hunting is allowed in the waterfowl refuge area. Hunting pheasants is not allowed on Tuesdays and Fridays during the season.



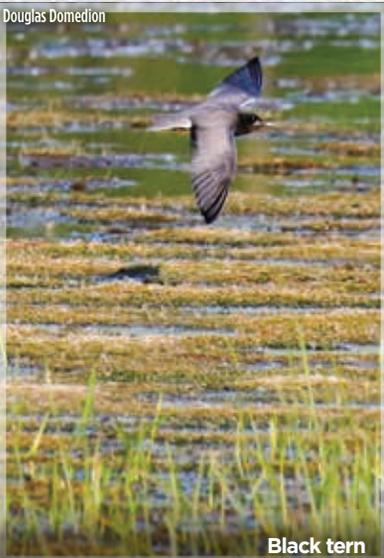
TRAPPING: Permits are required for trapping, and there is a trap limit for muskrat and wetland mink.



DIRECTIONS: Tonawanda WMA can be accessed from multiple roads, primarily from Route 77/Lewiston Road in Genesee and Niagara Counties. Due to its size, there are parcels in four different counties, including Genesee, Niagara, Orleans, and Erie.



CONTACT: For information, call DEC at (585) 948-5182 or visit www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/24442.html.



Black tern



Wood duck



Muskrat