

Gildersleeve Island

Silvio O. Conte National Wildlife Refuge, CT

SITE DESCRIPTION & LOCATION:

Gildersleeve Island contains approximately 80 acres, and is situated on the Connecticut River midway between the towns of Cromwell and Portland, CT — USGS Map *Middle Haddam Quadrangle*. Gildersleeve Island is a special focus area of the Connecticut River Silvio O. Conte Wildlife Refuge. Formerly used as a grazing area for farm animals and haying, Gildersleeve Island has reverted to flood plain forest and sandy riverine habitat.

ECOLOGICAL VALUES:

Alluvial flood plain forest and riverine habitat boasts a variety of neo-tropical migrants and provides near-shore shallows suitable for foraging wading birds. It has large cottonwood and silver maple trees, suitable for State-endangered and Federally-threatened nesting Bald Eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*).

Tidewater Mucklets (*Leptodea ochracea*), a state species of special concern, thrive in waters less than 3 M surrounding the island. State-threatened Atlantic Sturgeon (*Acipenser oxyrinchus*), and Federal and State-endangered Shortnose Sturgeon (*Acipenser brevirostrum*), are known to occur in the Connecticut River surround the island. Also, the Federal and State-endangered Puritan Tiger Beetle (*Cincindela puritana*) is known to occur in this area of the River.

PUBLIC USE:

Seasonal waterfowl hunting is practised by the game club that owns Gildersleeve Island. In the summer, the island's exposed sand bars provide boaters, kayakers, and canoeists opportunities for picnicking and other recreation.

Naturalists document the numerous fauna and flora specimens endemic to the island, as well as monitoring exotic, non-native species.

THREATS:

Gildersleeve Island lies in the heavily populated central Connecticut valley. Sale of the Island to parties unconcerned with its ecological values could lead to habitat change not conducive to endangered and threatened species.

Expanding marinas are introducing increased recreational boat traffic around the island during the Bald Eagle nesting season. Some of these boaters have interfered with the eagles normal feeding patterns, threatening the survival of the chicks.

ACQUISITION STATUS:

Gildersleeve Island is a special focus area of the Silvio O. Conte Wildlife Refuge. The USFWS will work with local conservation groups and The Nature Conservancy to protect the island through easements, management agreements or acquisition. The game club that owns the property has shown interest in selling for conservation purposes. Land in the adjacent flood plain has been valued at \$1000 to \$2000 per acre.

PUBLIC SUPPORT:

The inclusion of Gildersleeve Island into the Silvio O. Conte National Wildlife Refuge has the support of Mattabesek Audubon Society (the local chapter of the National Audubon Society), the Middlesex Land Trust, The Nature Conservancy, the Cromwell Fish and Game Club, the Portland Farmers Fish and Game Club, and the general public.

HABITAT:

Sandy island
Sand bars
Riverine beach
Floodplain forest

SPECIES:

Endangered, Threatened, Species of Special Concern:

Bald Eagle, Short-Nosed Sturgeon, Atlantic Sturgeon, Tidewater Mucket (mussel), Puritan Tiger Beetle.

Other species:

Beaver, White-tailed Deer, Great Horned Owl, Barred Owl, Screech Owl, Great Blue Heron, American Egret, Snowy Egret, Green-backed Heron, Common Yellowthroat, American Red-start, Yellow Warbler, Pileated Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Belted Kingfisher.