

The Vidda Foundation
Final Report of
**Constitution Marsh Audubon Center and
Sanctuary**

on grant period beginning 7/1/2025

NARRATIVE

I. Major Objectives

List the major objectives of the grant as specified in your original grant proposal. Describe the progress toward accomplishing your objectives and note the number of persons affected by your activities (when appropriate).

CAPACITY BUILDING and CENTER IMPROVEMENTS: Over the past year, we have made significant investments in improving the accessibility, safety, and functionality of our facilities to better serve visitors and support our growing conservation and education programs. Key improvements include upgraded building decks that provide enhanced ADA access, improved signage at the entry of our site, and the installation of a footing drain at the Center building to help prevent basement flooding and protect critical infrastructure. In addition, in partnership with a consultant and New York State Parks, we also completed a Boardwalk Needs Assessment to guide future improvements to this important visitor amenity.

CONSERVATION-BASED PROGRAMS AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: Through our conservation-based education and community engagement efforts, Constitution Marsh and the Hudson Valley Sanctuaries continue to connect people of all ages with meaningful opportunities to learn about, participate in, and take action for conservation. During the 2025-26 season, we reached 271 youth through our immersive, multi-session environmental education programming. We also employed one young professional, engaged 78 volunteers in stewardship and conservation activities, 20 young professional volunteers, and collaborated with six partner organizations to expand our impact across the region.

In total, we conducted 35 mission aligned public programs, reaching 315 community members through events, volunteer projects, citizen science initiatives, and conservation action opportunities. These programs foster environmental stewardship, build conservation knowledge and skills, and strengthen connections between people and the natural resources of the Hudson Valley. Through continued partnerships and community engagement, we are expanding opportunities for individuals to participate in conservation and contribute to the protection and restoration of local habitats.

Our Youth Climate Program was a tremendous success this year. Through a multi-session curriculum focused on Climate Change 101, climate anxiety, and climate action planning, we

engaged 180 students across four regional high schools. The program provided students with the knowledge, skills, and support needed to better understand climate change and identify meaningful ways to take action in their communities. One of the program's most significant outcomes was the engagement of students in environmental advocacy. Several participants went on to take part in Audubon New York's Youth Advocacy Day in Albany, where they had the opportunity to share their perspectives with state leaders and advocate for climate and conservation priorities (see attached article). This progression from education to action demonstrates the program's success in empowering young people to become informed and engaged environmental leaders.

BIRD-FRIENDLY FOREST MANAGEMENT AT RHEINSTROM HILL AUDUBON CENTER: Last year, Rheinstrom Hill Audubon Sanctuary continued to demonstrate the benefits of active forest management for both wildlife and the community. The sanctuary also served as a living demonstration site, where community members, landowners, and conservation professionals participated in 4 separate workshops. We also maintained the NY DEC's Deer Management Assistance Program (DMAP) to support forest regeneration and improve habitat quality.

BUTTERCUP FARM GRASSLAND BIRD HABITAT: This past year, we initiated a management planning process for Buttercup Farm to identify priority habitat restoration and stewardship projects that will enhance the property's ecological value. We also established a dedicated volunteer cohort that has played an important role in supporting trail stewardship and other on-the-ground conservation efforts. In addition, we joined with The Bobolink Project to strengthen our management practices for grassland-dependent birds, including bobolinks and other breeding grassland species. Through this partnership, we are developing better strategies to improve habitat quality, implement bird-friendly land management practices, and establish effective monitoring protocols to support the long-term conservation of these declining species.

CONSTITUTION MARSH INVASIVE SPECIES AND SEA LEVEL RISE MITIGATION: This past year, we were awarded a New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Invasive Species Grant to support the eradication of *Phragmites* at both Constitution Marsh and RamsHorn-Livingston Sanctuary. This work builds on years of restoration efforts aimed at improving habitat quality, increasing native biodiversity, and enhancing the long-term resilience of these critical wetland ecosystems. In addition, we continue to participate in a long-term monitoring program using Surface Elevation Tables (SETs) to measure sediment accumulation and changes in marsh elevation over time. These data help us better understand how our wetlands are responding to sea-level rise and inform management strategies that can enhance the marsh's ability to adapt to the impacts of climate change. Through invasive species management, habitat restoration, and climate resilience monitoring, we are working to protect and strengthen these valuable tidal wetlands for the benefit of wildlife and the surrounding community.

2. Outcomes

What outcomes have been achieved over the grant term? Was it necessary to make any modifications to the program? Are you on schedule? If the grant did not achieve some of the objectives above, please explain.

Over the grant period, we:

- Made significant progress in implementing our strategic vision and action plan for Constitution Marsh as a Conservation Action Center.
- Continued to monitor and steward our Audubon properties to enhance and maintain habitat for priority bird species and other wildlife.
- Engaged local communities through bird-friendly habitat management workshops, volunteer opportunities, and conservation-focused educational programs.
- Provided mentorship and hands-on learning opportunities for young professionals pursuing careers in conservation and environmental stewardship.
- Expanded our conservation action programming, creating more opportunities for community members to participate in meaningful conservation efforts.
- Increased public access and visitation through our on-site parking reservation system, allowing more people to experience and connect with the Marsh.
- Continued invasive species management efforts to restore native wetland habitats and improve conditions for birds, wildlife, and ecosystem health.
- Conducted grassland bird surveys and habitat monitoring to evaluate the effectiveness of our stewardship practices and support the conservation of breeding grassland bird populations

3. Evaluation & Learning

Briefly summarize the evaluation process for the effectiveness of the grant. What have you learned from your own evaluation? Describe any lessons you learned in carrying out the objectives (improved processes, new strategies, unexpected obstacles or results, etc.)

We evaluated the effectiveness of this grant through a combination of measures, including tracking program participation, volunteer engagement, youth and community members reached, conservation activities completed, habitat stewardship outcomes, and progress toward objectives outlined in our action plan. We also assessed the strength of partnerships developed and fostered, the implementation of facility and accessibility improvements, and the

advancement of priority conservation initiatives such as invasive species management, habitat restoration, and climate resilience monitoring.

Through this evaluation, we learned that strong partnerships and volunteer engagement significantly increase our capacity to achieve conservation outcomes and expand community impact. We also found that classroom-based conservation and climate education programs are an effective and scalable model for reaching youth and can be adapted for broader implementation. Lessons learned include the value of building local stewardship through hands-on engagement, the importance of strengthening organizational capacity to support growing program demand, and the need for continued collaboration with partners to leverage resources and expertise.

4. **Notable Accomplishments**

What do you consider your most notable accomplishments during the past year?

During the grant period, Constitution Marsh advanced its vision as a Conservation Action Center through expanded conservation programming, habitat stewardship, and community engagement. Key accomplishments included securing a DEC grant to continue *Phragmites* eradication at Constitution Marsh and RamsHorn-Livingston Sanctuary, strengthening grassland bird conservation through a new partnership with The Bobolink Project, launching a habitat management planning process at Buttercup Farm, and continuing long-term sea-level rise monitoring. We also enhanced visitor access through site improvements, expanded volunteer and youth engagement opportunities, and strengthened partnerships with schools, conservation organizations, and New York State Parks to increase our collective conservation impact across the Hudson Valley.

5. **Challenges & Obstacles**

What were the greatest challenges/obstacles you faced while developing and implementing the program(s)?

While we have made significant progress toward our conservation and community engagement goals, several challenges continue to affect our work. Managing invasive species and addressing the impacts of sea-level rise remain ongoing, resource-intensive efforts that require long-term monitoring, specialized expertise, and sustained funding. Like many conservation organizations, we also face capacity limitations related to staffing and the maintenance needs of aging infrastructure, while balancing the growing demand for public access, educational programming, and habitat stewardship. In addition, implementing conservation projects often requires extensive coordination with partners, volunteers, regulatory agencies, and land managers. Despite these challenges, we continue to build our organizational capacity, strengthen partnerships, and leverage volunteer support to advance conservation outcomes and expand community engagement across our sanctuary properties.

6. Partnerships

What other organizations/coalitions have you worked with to achieve these goals?

This year, we established a new partnership with The Bobolink Project, joining a regional effort to monitor and conserve bobolinks and other grassland bird species. We are also continuing to strengthen our relationships with New York State Parks, regional school districts surrounding our properties, the Stanfordville Conservation Advisory Council (CAC), the Waterman Bird Club, local Audubon chapters, and a local boating outfitter. These partnerships expand our capacity to advance conservation, education, and community engagement by connecting expertise, resources, and volunteers across the region. By working collaboratively, we are able to achieve greater impact, foster environmental stewardship, and build stronger connections between people and the natural landscapes we all share.

7. Looking Ahead

What opportunities and challenges do you foresee for the near future?

Looking ahead, Constitution Marsh has significant opportunities to expand its impact through continued implementation of its Conservation Action Center vision. Growing interest in conservation, environmental education, volunteerism, and climate resilience presents opportunities to deepen community engagement, expand youth and young professional programs, strengthen partnerships, and increase habitat restoration efforts across our properties. The success of initiatives such as the Youth Climate Program, volunteer stewardship programs, and partnerships with organizations like The Bobolink Project provides a strong foundation for future growth and regional collaboration.

At the same time, we anticipate challenges related to securing sustained funding for long-term conservation priorities, including invasive species management, habitat restoration, climate resilience initiatives, and facility improvements. The impacts of sea-level rise and other climate-related changes will continue to place pressure on sensitive wetland habitats, requiring ongoing monitoring and adaptive management. As visitation and program demand increase, balancing public access with the protection of ecologically sensitive resources will remain a priority. Addressing these challenges will require continued investment in organizational capacity, strong partnerships, and dedicated community support to ensure the long-term health and resilience of Constitution Marsh and its sanctuary properties.

8. Financial

Please provide income and expense information to date for the program(s) funded by the grant. Describe any budget changes or financial adaptations.

Please note that we are still closing FY26 and our Budget to Actuals is not yet available. We would be happy to send them when they are complete.

9. Suggestions

Do you have suggestions for ways to improve the Vidda Foundation's grant, proposal, and evaluation processes? Feel free to answer in the space provided below. Alternatively, these may be submitted anonymously by mail to:

*The Vidda Foundation
c/o TCC Group
333 Seventh Avenue, 9th Floor
New York, NY 10001*

OPTIONAL ATTACHMENTS

If you wish to attach relevant materials, newsletters, articles, etc. that you feel would provide Trustees with a better understanding of your activities and accomplishments, please include here. If materials are attached in a separate document, please include a list of attachments.

[Hudson Valley Students and Teachers Bring "Youth Climate Summit" Experiences to Albany for Youth Advocacy Day](#)



NEW YORK

NEWS

Hudson Valley Students and Teachers Bring “Youth Climate Summit” Experiences to Albany for Youth Advocacy Day

This annual event connects legislators with student constituents across New York.



Students and teachers from the Youth Climate Summit stand alongside Lexi Klahn of Constitution Marsh Audubon Center and Sanctuary. Photo: Eric Lind/Audubon



Share

By Diana Wilson*Communications Associate, Audubon Connecticut & New York*

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This article is from [Audubon New York](#). Find Audubon near you [here](#).

Each year, students and educators involved in Audubon’s conservation programs wake up as early as 4:00 am to travel to the State Capitol in Albany for our annual Youth Advocacy Day. There, students meet with legislators to share stories and experiences about their local ecosystems, why they matter, and the work being done to protect them.

One participant from Long Island shared his experience building shelters for Least Terns and watching in awe as he witnessed a chick finally approach the shelter and duck its head into the shade. The lawmaker listening to his story immediately asked to see photos of the project and the birds.



Students Charlie (left) and Minisha (right) on their way to the Youth Advocacy Day. Photo: Kathleen Westervelt

“I look forward to these Youth Advocacy Days every year. We get to connect our students with their legislators, and we also get to connect these legislators with constituents they may not otherwise have the opportunity to speak with,” says Erin McGrath, policy director for Audubon New York. “It’s a win-win.”

Last year, Lexi Klahn attended the Youth Advocacy Day as a young professional representing the Hudson Valley; this year, she brought a team of students along.

As the program manager for Audubon’s Hudson Valley sanctuaries—including Constitution Marsh Audubon Center and Sanctuary—she

has been working with this group of students since the fall, teaching them about climate change, conservation, and advocacy through the center’s Youth Climate Summit program.

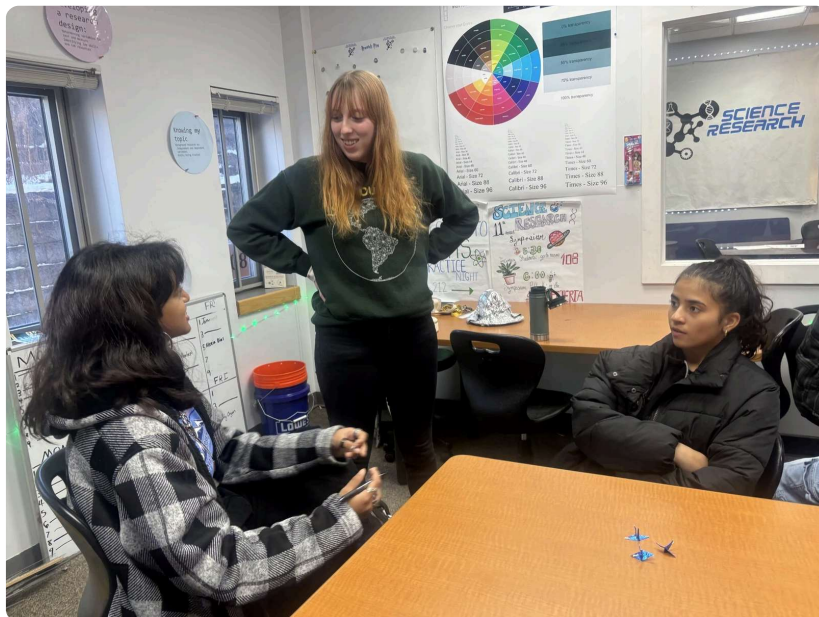
Inspired by The Wild Center’s Youth Climate Program, Constitution Marsh began running its own Youth Climate Summits in 2022. As of this past fall, it is held as a series of interactive lessons Klahn teaches inside classrooms across the Hudson Valley.

It is so important for [teens] to know that even if they aren’t yet able to vote, they’re still constituents and they still have a voice.

Lexi Klahn, Constitution Marsh Audubon Center and Sanctuary

One of these lessons is fully focused on advocacy. Using real-world case studies—including some from work across the National Audubon Society’s network—and other tools, Klahn showed her students how people are advocating for the environment and how they can be part of that work.

“In this day and age, many teenagers are struggling to find ways to make a difference in the world they live in,” says Klahn. “It is so important for them to know that even if they aren’t yet able to vote, they’re still constituents and they still have a voice.”



Lexi Klahn and two students—including Minisha, who attended the Youth Advocacy Day—during a Youth Climate Summit lesson. Photo: Kathleen Westervelt

When the opportunity arose for some of her students and teachers to attend this year’s Youth Advocacy Day, Klahn jumped on it.

Four students and teachers joined her on the full-day trip up to Albany. Throughout the day, they spoke with different legislators about climate change in the Hudson Valley region and ways their ecosystems were important to them.

I learned that youth advocates are just as important as adult advocates when lobbying.

Minisha Singh, Putnam Valley High School

“As a teacher and an environmentalist, I never knew it was possible for me and my students to lobby together,” says Kathleen Westervelt, a teacher from Putnam Valley Central School District who attended the event. “I was very proud to see my students share what the environment and environmental education means to them.”

Nicolette Viano-Burnett, a teacher at Highland Falls-Montgomery Central School District, concurs: “It was incredibly empowering for both students and adults to advocate for their passion and love of nature. This experience will be remembered not only for the events that took place, but also for the valuable skills gained in turning ideas into real change at the state level.”

The students involved also found the experience transformative. “That day had a lot of firsts for me, and I’m very grateful,” said Minisha Singh, one of the student participants. “I learned that youth advocates are just as important as adult advocates when lobbying. Voices coming from a variety of people make a significant impact, and I learned that my experience and voice hold value, and can impact people and the environment. I’m incredibly grateful for the educational experience and hope to lobby again in the future!”



TOP LEFT A "tree" created by students at Putnam Valley High School as part of the Youth Climate Summit lessons. This project helps students reflect on their connection to the environment. Photo: Kathleen Westervelt **BOTTOM RIGHT** Students learn about the impacts a changing climate will have on birds. Photo: Kathleen Westervelt

Already, students and teachers have signed up for next year's Youth Advocacy Day. But the opportunities for participating in advocacy and climate action for the students go far beyond one day of lobbying.

As the year progresses, students involved in the Youth Climate Summit will work on designing and executing their Climate Action Plans. They'll pull from Klahn's lessons and their own experiences to address problems they see in their own communities—and beyond!

"The Youth Climate program shows what's possible when Audubon brings young people together and gives them real opportunities to connect, learn, and lead," said Rebecca Schultz, director of the Hudson Valley Sanctuaries. "When students are empowered, they bring the energy and creativity that will help shape the future of conservation—and they remind all of us why investing in youth leadership matters now more than ever."

The Constitution Marsh Audubon Center and Sanctuary's Youth Climate Summit is made possible with generous support from lifelong birder Doug Bloom, past president and current vice-president of Bronx River-Sound Shore Audubon Society. Doug joined his local chapter over 65

8/11/26, 2:04 PM

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years ago at the age of nine, and has been an officer leading their board in varying roles for 35 years.