



DELAWARE WILD LANDS NEWS

NOVEMBER 01, 2012

BETTS FARM WETLAND RESTORATION TAKES SHAPE

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Rick McCorkle of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service surveying current elevations at the project site.

Since the days of Delaware's colonial settlement and over the course of our history since, Delaware's freshwater wetlands have been extensively filled, ditched, drained, diked, and built over to accommodate agriculture and an increasing level of development. According to *Delaware Wetlands: Status and Changes from 1992 to 2007* (State of Delaware and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service 2011), Delaware has lost more than 50% of its wetlands since the late 1700s, with increasing rates of loss in more recent years. From 1992 to 2007, more than 1,860 acres of wetlands were lost in the Delaware Bay Drainage Basin alone and nearly 3,900 acres of wetlands statewide.

To help address wetlands loss and restore wildlife habitat, and building on our highly productive and successful partnership at the Great Cypress Swamp, Delaware Wild Lands is again teaming up with Ducks Unlimited and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service to restore and enhance 15 acres of freshwater wetlands at our Betts Farm (located at Augustine Creek in southern New Castle County). The Betts Farm was chosen for this project specifically because of the "signature" of historic freshwater wetlands and presence of hydric (or "wet") soils at the site.

Delaware Wild Lands has a strong relationship with the local hunting and farming communities, and we are committed to fostering greater ecological function of our land holdings while supporting traditional uses of the land (agriculture,

silviculture, and hunting). The unique design of this wetlands restoration project reflects this value by reserving adequate ingress and egress to agricultural fields located in the immediate vicinity of the project. For example, pathways in and around the project site will be designed with widths necessary to accommodate farm equipment and berms will be engineered to allow farm equipment to traverse the area without negatively impacting the project.

Delaware Wild Lands believes it is critically important, in today's global economy and environment, to sustain agricultural and silvicultural production and provide food and fiber to the region, contributions to the local economy, and income for Delawareans. We will continue these practices, identifying ways to make agriculture and forestry more compatible with conservation, and serve as a leader in and model for stewardship of privately-owned conservation lands.

We would like to thank our partners in this project: Ducks Unlimited, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, and Welfare Foundation. We are grateful for your on-going and generous commitments to conservation and assistance with this project.

Look for an update on this wetlands restoration and reconstruction project in our next newsletter.

Cypress Swamp NAWCA Project Nears Completion:

Seed Funding and An Idea Spurs 1,000 Acres of Continued Wetlands Restoration

Blanketing more than 10,500 acres, Delaware Wild Lands' Great Cypress Swamp (located in Sussex County, Delaware) is the largest remaining tract of contiguous forest on the Delmarva Peninsula and one of its most unique wetland systems. The land mass serves as the headwaters for Delaware's Inland Bays and the Pocomoke River, which flows into the Chesapeake Bay. Historically bald cypress and Atlantic white cedar forests dominated the Swamp, but have declined dramatically since the time of colonial settlement. An extensive network of historic drainage ditches short-circuited the availability of water throughout the Swamp, diminishing both the extent and ecological function of the Great Cypress Swamp.

The tremendous tangible and intangible benefits provided by the Great Cypress Swamp, and the impact of this resource on the everyday lives of humans and animals, cannot be overstated. In addition to filtering pollutants from air and water resources, recharging groundwater supplies, and providing diverse wildlife habitat, one can find respite and relaxation in the Swamp, a view of forestlands that stretch to the horizon, opportunities to view forest-interior birds as they forage and nest, the call of a wild turkey, or simply the solitude derived only from complete silence.

In 2008, a crew of conservation professionals with expertise in wildlife habitat restoration, wetlands hydrology, ecology, field construction, surveying and engineering, soil science, and forestry gathered at the Swamp, working together to determine the best starting point for a large scale restoration of a wetland system almost three times the size of Dover Air Force Base. The United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) served as our lead partner in this endeavor with substantial support and commitments from The Delaware Center

for the Inland Bays (CIB), Ducks Unlimited (DU), and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Initially, this conservation collaboration focused on our Layton Tract, including installation of six water control structures and completion of a 49-acre Atlantic white cedar tree planting that benefited over 1,000 acres of previously ditched and drained wooded wetlands.

Inspired by the results of this initial effort, Ducks Unlimited secured a \$75,000 grant from the highly-competitive and nationally-administered North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) program to further advance the group's efforts and accomplishments. With the partnership and funding in place, USFWS, DU, CIB, NRCS, and DWL again joined forces to plan, design, initiate, and restore an additional 345 acres at the Great Cypress Swamp. In late 2010, Delaware Wild Lands prepared 170 acres within the larger project site for a future large-scale tree planting. The following spring (2011), with the support from NRCS, Delaware Wild Lands planted more than 48,000 Atlantic white cedar seedlings in a prepared site that was part of the original 2008 project.

For the final phase of this NAWCA project, Delaware Wild Lands will be planting an additional 17,000 seedlings over the course of 2013 and 2014. *The final count of trees planted as part of this overall restoration effort will total 65,000.*

The initial 49-acre project and collaboration, started in 2008, expanded to include \$75,000 in Federal grant funding and additional investments of material and time from partners that exceeds \$200,000 – a return on investment of almost three to one. More importantly, however, is the trust built among partners and the realization of the scale of conservation that can be achieved through excellent collaboration.



View of Delaware Wild Lands' Great Cypress Swamp from a WBOC helicopter.

What is next?

For the next 10 years, Delaware Wild Lands will continue site preparations and plantings of Atlantic white cedar trees throughout the 345-acre NAWCA site. We hope the early successes of this effort and the scope of this restoration continue to attract partners and support for our restoration activities. There are only winners in projects of this nature and thanks to Delaware Wild Lands and our partners, future generations will experience the magnificence of a functional Atlantic white cedar forested wetland.

This 1,000-acre restoration concept began years ago with nominal funding and a handful of highly-motivated, conservation-minded individuals brainstorming a large scale swamp restoration design. As the final plantings for the NAWCA site are queued up, the combined resources and efforts of agencies and Federal conservation programs yielded an unparalleled scale of collaboration and on-the-ground conservation results. A sincere thank you to our partners for having the patience, tenacity and commitment to achieve together much more than what we could have achieved independently.

Birds of a Feather Flock Together...

DELAWARE WILD LANDS & TRI-STATE BIRD RESCUE RELEASE REHABILITATED BIRDS

The 4,900 acres of pristine coastal forests and flats at Delaware Wild Lands' New Castle County properties offered a welcome respite for recently-rehabilitated birds, including more than two dozen shorebirds that contracted botulism and several orphaned wood ducklings.

In August and September, staff from Tri-State Bird Rescue and Delaware Wild Lands watched as wood ducks and shorebirds cautiously emerged from their totes to investigate the amenities of their new habitat and surroundings at Delaware Wild Lands' Taylors Bridge and Augustine Creek properties. Multiple wood ducks, plovers, sandpipers, sanderlings, and yellow legs gingerly made their way to and through marsh and forests, mud flats and grasses, assimilating quickly and easily among other wood ducks and shorebirds already present at both release locations.

Severe drought conditions in July and August, and the associated decay of pond vegetation, contributed to an outbreak of avian botulism. Most of the released birds were banded with United States Fish & Wildlife Service metal bands and will be tracked as sightings of these birds are reported.



Tri-State Bird Rescue Executive Director Lisa Smith releases rehabilitated shorebirds.



Top: A surprised Ron Haas takes the stage and received the "Al Brothers Deer Manager of the Year" award presented annually by QDMA.

Bottom (Left to right): Joe Hamilton, Founder and Director of Development for QDMA. Ron Haas, DWL Project manager. Bryan Murphy, CEO of QDMA.

Quality Deer Management Association Honors DWL's Ron Haas

People who know Delaware Wild Lands' Project Manager Ron Haas know his passion for responsible wildlife and habitat management. Ron dedicates countless hours, nights, even weekends to developing approaches for maintaining a healthy and balanced deer herd. He then applies this knowledge and these practices and techniques to wildlife management efforts in the Great Cypress Swamp. Largely because of Ron's efforts and thirst for knowledge, this spring, Delaware Wild Lands' Great Cypress Swamp **became the first property in the nation** to receive the Quality Deer Management Association's (QDMA) "Legacy Lands" certification. So, it came as no great surprise

to our staff and Board when QDMA selected Ron to receive the prestigious "Al Brothers Deer Manager of the Year" award.

On August 10th, a surprised Ron Haas proudly accepted his award at the QDMA national convention in Nashville, Tennessee. This award is another representation of Delaware Wild Lands' long-standing relationship with QDMA and our commitment to the quality deer management philosophy. Delaware Wild Lands is proud to have Ron as a staff member, and his work to advance excellence in wildlife habitat and deer herd management is deserving of recognition at the national level.



DELAWARE WILD LANDS NEWS

Thank you, Tidewater Utilities!

Tidewater Utilities selected Delaware Wild Lands as one of two beneficiaries of their 5th Annual Charitable Golf Tournament held in August, responding quickly to Delaware Wild Lands' immediate need for greater outreach, education, and conference capacity.

As a result of the environmental and economic successes associated with the sustainable forest management program at our 10,500-acre Great Cypress Swamp property, Delaware Wild Lands is developing a regional reputation as a leader in sustainable timber harvesting, ecological restoration, and community and cultural restoration. Staff are increasingly asked to participate in regional workshops and panel presentations and provide educational tours of our work for researchers, practitioners, community members, cultural and historical societies, students, members of the general public, and academicians from a diverse array of organizations and institutions that include Yale Forestry School; the Delaware Forest Service, West Virginia University School of Forestry, State and County Farm Bureaus; University of Georgia, birding clubs and outfitters, and the Society of American Foresters.

With the \$6,300 received from Tidewater Utilities, we purchased conference and communications equipment to facilitate communications about the successes of our work and provide educational and technical assistance to the multitude of organizations, agencies, researchers, and groups undertaking similar work in and throughout the region.



(l. to r.) Joe Cuccinello (Tidewater), Andrew Martin, Kate Hackett, Eugene Bayard, Jerry Esposito (Tidewater)

A sincere thank you to Tidewater Utilities; and the golf tournament sponsors George & Lynch, Inc.; IG Burton Chrysler, Dodge & Jeep; and Sensus Metering; and all those who participated in the golf tournament. Your support is helping Delaware Wild Lands advance land conservation restoration and the education, collaboration, and partnerships needed to protect Delaware's natural resources and vital landscapes.



How to give a donation to DWL

Delaware Wild Lands relies on the support of those who are committed to achieving great conservation in the first state.

Please support the work of Delaware Wild Lands with a tax-deductible contribution. Contributions can be submitted using the PayPal link on our website (www.delawarewildlands.org) or by sending a check to our office (Delaware Wild Lands, P.O. Box 505, Odessa, DE 19730).

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