

DELAWARE WILD LANDS NEWS

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Black ducks alight over our Field 7 restoration site at the Great Cypress Swamp.

The Story of DWL's Newest Acquisition:

Generosity of the Whaley Family expands protected lands at the Great Cypress Swamp

At DWL, we consider the Great Cypress Swamp in Sussex County to be a refuge for wildlife. With our ongoing freshwater wetlands and forest restoration projects, **what used to be intermittent sightings of river otter, waterfowl, migratory birds, eagles, and other wildlife are now regular occurrences.**

Our efforts to restore the conditions for Atlantic White Cedar and Baldcypress and the wildlife communities that depend on them include decades of directing water back into historic wetland areas and planting more than 168,000 trees in the past five years. In the early stages of our restoration efforts, some questioned the projected outcomes of our work, and others shared our long-term vision for the Great Cypress Swamp. **A most rewarding endorsement of our work, however, came this year with the donation of the 15-acre Whaley tract, now an addition to DWL's Great Cypress Swamp landholdings.**

A migrating Greater Yellowlegs foraging on mudflats at DWL's Great Cypress Swamp.

The Whaley property is located within the headwaters of the Pocomoke River, which is a tributary to the Chesapeake Bay. The wooded wetlands that comprise the property provide splendid habitat for ground-nesting birds, migratory songbirds, and amphibians and reptiles, and are also integral to sustaining the high levels of water quality within this portion of the Chesapeake Bay headwaters.

Continued on center spread...



Notes from DWL's Executive Director, Kate Hackett



This spring's flowering dogwood at the Great Cypress Swamp.

In the business of land conservation, the standard of performance is forever. At DWL, we certainly assess our short-term impacts but our true successes are evaluated over the 50-year, 100-year, and even longer timeframes. So, five years may seem a bit like the blink of an eye. But I started at DWL five years ago and I challenge you to find a staff of five full-time and three part-time members who get more done with less money than the staff at DWL.

We believe strongly in protecting and preserving Delaware's most important natural resources...as well as Delaware's iconic character and culture. Call us the locavore choice for land conservation in Delaware. If you want to support an organization that has (and has had!) truly great impact throughout the State of Delaware and beyond, look no further.

Read further to learn about our most recent projects, partnerships, and accomplishments – and then I hope you will join us in expanding our efforts to sustain the future of Delaware's most vital and vibrant landscapes. With you on board, the next five years can be even more productive!

Social Media Milestones

Our foray into social media began slowly with Facebook -- and we are humbled now by growing interest and an outpouring of online support. Recently, **we celebrated two milestones: (1) last December, we surpassed 1,000 likes and since then we have continued growing to over 1,500 likes and (2) in just over one year on the platform, we have 1,000 followers on Instagram!**

We pride ourselves in delivering quality in all aspects of our work including our photos and other social media posts, and we are pleased so many of you appreciate them as well. **Your support on Facebook and Instagram gives us a lift** as more and more people become aware of our projects and accomplishments. And by following us on social media you will stay informed about our upcoming events and volunteer opportunities!

You can find us on Facebook at [facebook.com/DelawareWildLands](https://www.facebook.com/DelawareWildLands) and our Instagram handle is [delaware_wild_land](https://www.instagram.com/delaware_wild_land/). See you online!

DWL's Field Ecologist and Director of Social Media Andrew Martin gathering imagery for our social media posts.



Delaware Wild Lands' Board of Directors: *Blaine Phillips, Sr.*



From our earliest days, Blaine Phillips has helped shape the development and direction of Delaware's oldest and largest land trust, and there is no doubt DWL has benefited from Blaine's keen intellect and strategic guidance.

Born and raised in Lower Sussex County, Blaine learned to appreciate the Delmarva's natural beauty and wildlife

at an early age exploring the beaches and wingshooting in the marshes. After graduating with top honors from the University of Virginia Law School, he was invited to join some of Wall Street's most prestigious firms. Instead, disliking the hustle and bustle of New York City, he decided to stay in Delaware as a practicing lawyer with Potter Anderson & Corroon. Following his retirement, Blaine shifted all of his attention to charitable endeavors, especially those focusing on conservation of natural resources. In addition to DWL, he has provided leadership

to local, regional, national, and international organizations including Flora and Fauna International, Hagley Museum & Library, Winterthur Museum & Gardens, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Trout Unlimited, Red Clay Reservation, Fair Play Foundation, and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. Blaine has also served Mt. Cuba Center since its inception, helping to facilitate the protection of thousands of acres of threatened lands including two of DWL's most important acquisitions: the Sharp Farm and Roberts Farm.

Blaine's love of flyfishing and dedication to international conservation have taken Blaine and his wife to remote areas in many countries. They have been snowbound north of the Arctic Circle, stranded on the banks of a crocodile-infested river in Tanzania, swum with pink dolphins in the Amazon, and helped protect sea turtles in Nicaragua. Despite all these adventures, Blaine's heart remains rooted firmly in Delaware. He is a great promoter of DWL, and is invaluable in guiding the organization and keeping us focused and efficient. Blaine's extensive experience in law and conservation helps DWL look around the corner and think four steps ahead. Our reputation for success owes much to Blaine's leadership over the years.

Feeling hungry already...

Another delicious Game Dinner – in Kent County

Spectacular food and a sold-out crowd. That's the reputation DWL has developed for our Game Dinners at Cantwell's Tavern in Odessa.

This spring we're hosting a new event at Abbott's Grill in Milford. Save the Date for our first Kent County Game Dinner on March 23, 2017.

We guarantee that there is no more delicious way to support wildlife conservation and habitat restoration projects statewide. Tell us if you'd like to be added to the invitation list. Sponsorship opportunities are also available.

Join us at Abbott's Grill for a culinary experience you won't soon forget!



A New Bank Comes to Delaware: the Mid-Atlantic Regional Seed Bank

Seeds collected on DWL properties will help restore marshes damaged by Hurricane Sandy

Delaware has a long history with the banking industry – and now there is a new bank in Delaware collecting deposits and paying dividends for the future of our coastal habitats.

The Mid-Atlantic Regional Seed Bank (MARSB) is harvesting seeds of native plants from healthy marshes owned by DWL at Taylors Bridge. Some seeds will be stored for research and others will be replanted in hurricane-damaged areas of Delaware's bayshores.

This seed collection initiative, called Seeds of Success, is part of a national effort to safeguard native plants across the United States. MARSB is based in New York, and is part of a cooperative program of the NY City Parks Department and the Greenbelt Native Plant Center.

This fall, MARSB's priority is to collect seeds from three species of cordgrass (*Spartina alternifolia*, *Spartina cynosuroides*, and *Spartina patens*), which is valuable for marsh restoration because of its unusual ability to grow in salt water. One of the special challenges about harvesting spartina seed, however, is that it cannot be dried and stored long-term. Seeds like this are called "recalcitrant." To be viable, and once ripe spartina seeds are collected, they must be kept over winter in a "pickle barrel" of salt water brine and then planted the very next spring.

Other in-demand seeds for salt marsh restoration collected from DWL's Taylors Bridge properties this year include two beautifully-flowering species of swamp mallow (*Hibiscus moscheutos* and *Kosteletzkya virginica*), sturdy bulrush (*Bolboschoenus robustus*), and another saltmarsh grass called *Distichilis spicata*.



The flower and seed pod for native swamp mallow, common in Delaware marshes in late summer and early fall.

MAKING A DEPOSIT:

The Long Seed Bank Journey

Once seed is collected in Delaware, it first goes back to MARSB in Staten Island to be de-bugged (insects removed) and cataloged. To ensure the integrity of plant genetics, all seed collections are carefully tracked according to their harvest location. (For instance, the seeds collected on DWL properties will only be distributed to projects within the Delmarva region.)

The next step for each collection is to send a sample of one whole plant to the United States National Herbarium at the Smithsonian. Then the remaining bundle of dried plants travels to the Cape May Plant Material Center where the seeds are cleaned and separated.

A small portion of clean, dried seeds are sent to a long-term conservation seed bank in Fort Collins, Colorado and the rest are returned to MARSB. As an active seed bank, they keep the seeds in storage like a savings and loan until that species is requested for a restoration project.

Our partnership with MARSB ensures that we can withdraw the native seeds needed for our future land stewardship and restoration efforts and contribute to the long-term survival and propagation of Delmarva's important native species.

Volunteers for MARSB collect seed from DWL Taylors Bridge properties.



Taking Out the Trash:

Land stewardship is cleaning up

When DWL celebrates the acquisition of a new parcel and adds it to our portfolio of permanently protected lands, the real work has only just begun. We are now the custodians of these landholdings, forever. And **our mission calls for us to actively manage and improve the environmental quality of our lands.** Sometimes that means planting trees or restoring wetlands, and sometimes it's as simple as taking out the trash.

TIDYING UP IN TAYLORS BRIDGE:

In 2015, we acquired 1,253 acres near Taylors Bridge: the Roberts Farm and the Dee Smith parcel. Throughout generations of family ownership, both properties had accumulated old equipment and extensive debris that needed to be removed. **There were collapsing outbuildings, drums of used motor oil, tractor tires, heaps of refuse, and more.** With the help of funders and friends, numerous dumpsters and canisters full of potentially dangerous waste were hauled away and disposed of safely.

COASTAL CLEANUPS:

For the first time, two of our beaches at Milford Neck (Kent County) were included in Delaware's 30th annual Coastal Cleanup sponsored by DNREC. **These beaches are critical for horseshoe crab**

spawning and considered by ornithologists to be one of the best spots along the Delaware Bayshore for migratory shorebirds.

We also hosted a cleanup day at **our Liston Point Beach, the northernmost beach for terrapin nesting in Delaware.** One of our goals was to make the beach a healthy and welcoming spot for hatching baby turtles.

Our Liston Beach volunteers quickly filled two pickup trucks with collected trash such as plastic bottles, cigarette lighters, tires, tennis balls, and a children's toy mower. A group from the Brandywine Zoo Chapter of the American Association of Zoo Keepers participated and tallied our wildlife sightings that evening, including a great horned owl, quail, osprey, eagles, turkey vultures, herons, and egrets. Said one, "I work with owls at the Zoo all the time but this is the first time I've seen one in its own habitat!"

If you or your group would like to help us with a habitat cleanup project, let us know!



Photo Credit: Bob Meadows

The Story of DWL's Newest Acquisition:

DWL Executive Director Kate Hackett honors Dr. Peter Whaley and Mrs. Mary Hitch for their generous donation of land to DWL.

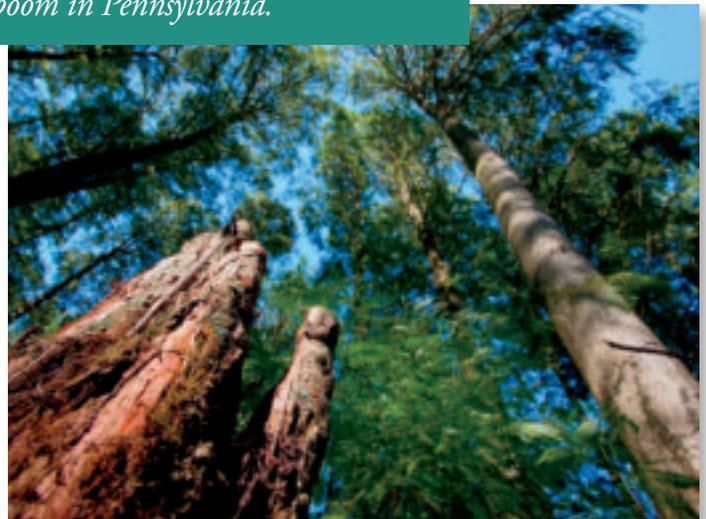
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Two siblings, Dr. Peter Whaley and Mrs. Mary Hitch, generously gifted their family land to DWL this year. In talking with Dr. Whaley and Mrs. Hitch about the history of this property, **we learned the Swamp provided another kind of refuge for their family members who fled England in the 1700s in fear of persecution.** Upon landing in Connecticut, the Whaleys' ancestors ventured south searching for a new life under assumed names. Finding anonymity in the remoteness of the Great Cypress Swamp, the Whaleys settled in the community now known as Whaleyville.

The journey of the Whaleys' ancestors is not unlike the journey of many types of migratory bird and wildlife species travelling back and forth from their nesting grounds to their wintering grounds, seeking solace, support, and sources of food. Each year, at the Great Cypress Swamp, we witness the arrival and departure of waterfowl, warblers, tanagers, and wading birds. **In other seasons, staff hears — among other creatures — the cry of bald eagles, blows and snorts of deer, gobbling of wild turkey, and the calls of more than 12 different species of frogs.**

Looking back in time, the Swamp provided many other types of opportunity and refuge. Historians know the Swamp served as an important route for the Underground Railroad, enabling slaves and abolitionist guides to escape bounty hunters and carry them towards freedom in Pennsylvania. Over the years, the Swamp also harbored deserting Union and Confederate troops, outlaws, bootleggers and smugglers, all of whom depended on the seclusion of the Swamp for their success.

In the 1800s, timber from the Whaley property, now part of DWL's Great Cypress Swamp landholdings, was used to construct underground supports during the coal mining boom in Pennsylvania.

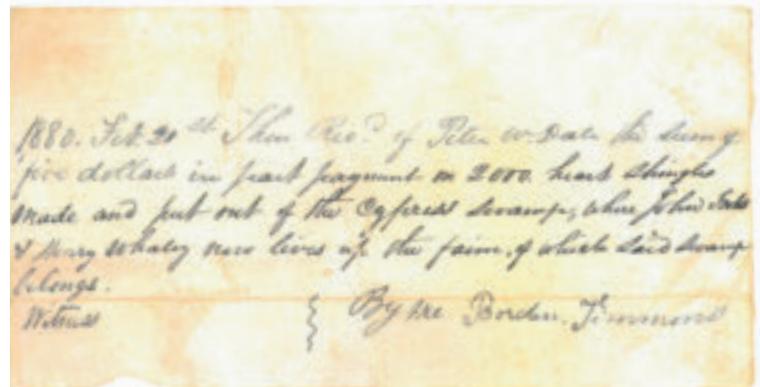


Looking into the canopy of DWL's oldest Baldcypress trees. DWL's certified forest management and restoration plan will result in the establishment of many stands of Baldcypress trees throughout the Great Cypress Swamp.



Wild turkey poults and immature wood ducks are frequent visitors to DWL's forest and wetlands restoration sites at the Great Cypress Swamp.

As we advance our land conservation work, we also want to highlight and connect the importance of land resources to the past and future of the Delmarva. **We are pleased to serve as guardians of the land donated by Dr. Peter Whaley and Mrs. Mary Hitch, protecting the cultural heritage and critical importance of these distinctive lands and ensuring forever the availability of clean water, healthy forests, and abundant wildlife habitat.**



For hundreds of years, many areas within the Swamp provided sources of rot-resistant lumber used for shipbuilding and the construction of shingles, siding on homes, water tanks, and coffins. This bill of sale from 1880 documents the sale of cedar shingles made from wood from the Great Cypress Swamp.



OUT AND ABOUT ON DELAWARE WILD LANDS' PROPERTIES



Welcome to the Wild Lands Café:

Bugs on the Menu

Delaware Wild Lands' august history and many land acquisition successes have yielded some of the most pristine habitat remaining in the State of Delaware. Now **DWL is working to improve the benefits provided by these lands including air and water quality, groundwater infiltration, carbon sequestration, and wildlife habitat.** In particular, we are working to ensure we have the right "recipe" for foods needed by the diverse waterfowl and wildlife species that rely on DWL's landholdings. Put simply, this boils down to bugs. **Though pesky, annoying, and even destructive at times, bugs are a primary source of protein and nutrients and key to sustaining bird and wildlife populations.**

Dragonflies and their nymphs are vital food sources for ducks and other birdlife. Their presence is consistent with high quality habitat.

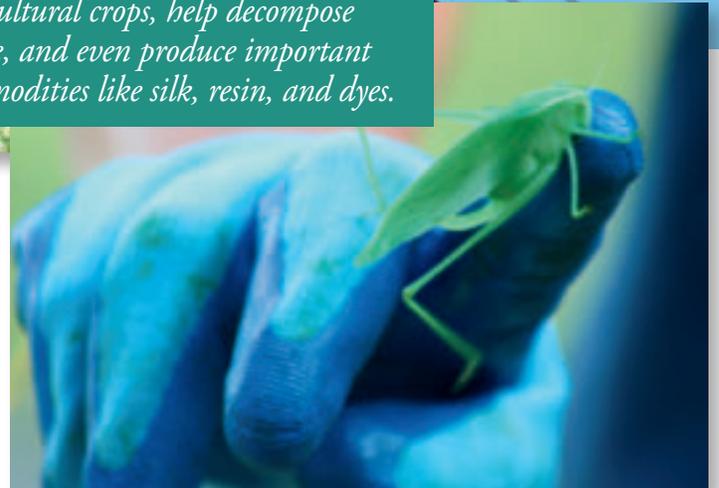


Insects are beneficial to humans, as well, and pollinate flowers and agricultural crops, help decompose waste, and even produce important commodities like silk, resin, and dyes.

DWL staff removing Mile-a-Minute and Autumn Clematis that is covering trees in the background of this photo. Removal of these vines enables sunlight to penetrate the tree canopy and allows wildlife and ground nesting birds better access into the forest.

For bugs to thrive, plants must be plentiful. **However, not all plants are created equal.** For example, grasses that grow in the coastal areas of Texas are not the same as the grasses that grow in Delaware. Though there may be similarities, species that grow in Delaware have a genetic disposition for survival in Delaware and endemic characteristics that are important to the vitality of our local ecosystem. **That is, the insect species of Delaware rely on the native plants of Delaware. Consequently, healthy and vibrant native vegetation is needed to support the viability of Delaware's insect populations and, ultimately, our wildlife populations.**

One of the greatest threats to the availability of high quality habitat, food sources, and insect species for Delaware's wildlife species is the proliferation of rapidly-spreading invasive species which can quickly "crowd out" our native species. Left unchecked, **non-native and invasive species invade, disrupt, and even change existing habitat conditions, depleting food sources needed by insects, birds, and our native wildlife.** Thus an overabundance of invasive species can result in losing our native vegetation and insects as well as the wildlife and birds that depend on them.



Katydid are primarily leaf eaters. This katydid was found at DWL's Sharp Farm and, like other insects, is an important source of food for birds.

Controlling invasive species is one way DWL ensures our lands provide reliable food sources and high quality habitat. These management efforts are (1) securing native plants and food sources for insects and wildlife; (2) preventing complete enclosure of the tree canopy resulting from the rapid spread of vines, such as Mile-A-Minute and Autumn Clematis; and (3) prohibiting dense "walls" of vegetation that prohibit wildlife from entering the forest edge.

To maximize the return on our effort, we are working with other land managers to prioritize and increase the effectiveness of our invasive species control efforts to protect our most important valuable and vibrant habitat.

Land ho! Our paddlers celebrated an informative and adventurous trip.



What Floats Your Boat: A Paddle Up Blackbird Creek

At DWL we are proud of our role in protecting the 1,250-acre Roberts Farm and forming a block of 10,000 acres of protected lands in rapidly-developing southern New Castle County...and what better way to show it off than from a canoe!

In July and September, in partnership with the Delaware National Estuarine Research Reserve, we hosted **paddling trips up Blackbird Creek to learn more about Delaware's only unditched tributary to the Delaware Bay.**

Unique in its ecology, lands within the Blackbird Creek watershed are a high priority for conservation because they provide exceptional habitat for resident and migratory birds and wildlife as well as pristine nursery grounds for fish and invertebrates. The **Blackbird**



DNERR staff prep and ready the boats.

Creek "Corridor" also provides a playbook for restoration projects and an ambitious benchmark for the desired conditions of other Delaware watersheds. Participants learned about water quality testing, bird migrations, marsh ecology, salt water impact and intrusion, and critical importance of native insects and stopping invasive species.

The most daring of the groups decided to switch canoes mid-stream in a scramble of paddlers across the gunwales of adjacent canoes...without capsizing canoes or plunging paddlers!



A better day couldn't be had for this journey along Blackbird Creek.

Racks and Quacks' Bluebird Trail at DWL's Betts Farm

Another way DWL's hunt clubs lend a hand

Once in significant decline, the population of Eastern bluebirds is rebounding thanks to the many people who have installed and dutifully monitored nest boxes throughout the years – including Dave Shetzler, Frank Bailey, and the Racks and Quacks Hunt Club. Dave installed the first bluebird nest box at DWL's Betts Farm in 1996 and, since then, Racks and Quacks has installed 16 more bluebird boxes.

Like other birds, bluebirds feed on insects during the nesting season, so the best nest box real estate is large open fields, an uncommon habitat among the highly-developed regions of New Castle County.

In addition to food, birds vie for the best opportunities to build their nests in the protective cover of a nesting box. House sparrows and tree swallows can be particularly fierce competitors and have been known to destroy bluebird nests. This summer, Racks and Quacks

Racks and Quacks Hunt Club members ready another bluebird nest box.



Success - a male bluebird sits inside a Betts Farm bluebird box!



We thank Frank, Dave, and the Racks and Quacks Hunt Club for their dedication to monitoring and maintaining bluebird boxes and for all their help managing DWL's Betts Farm!

found evidence that a house sparrow killed a bluebird inside a nest box and then proceeded to build its nest on the deceased bird!

Bluebirds must also defend their nests from non-avian predators as well. Snakes, raccoons, hawks, and owls can all be problematic. Dave reduced hawk and owl predation by constructing deeper boxes. Racks and Quacks continues to make other improvements – for example, they recently started using the front end loader of their tractor to drive the support stakes for nest box installation (rather than digging holes!).

Racks and Quacks instructs DWL Executive Director to paint liquid dish detergent on the interior top of the nest boxes to prevent wasp nests inside.



Different birds use different materials for nest construction, enabling volunteers to identify species using the nest boxes even if birds are not present.



Racks and Quacks Hunt Club develops an improved method for driving stakes for bluebird nest boxes.

What do the Great Cypress Swamp and Grammy Awards have in common?

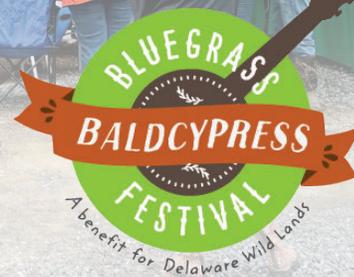
Courtney Hartman, from the Grammy-nominated bluegrass band Della Mae

DWL's Baldcypress Bluegrass Festival sits in the foreground of our oldest stand of Baldcypress trees. These trees are estimated to be 150 to 200 years old.

This year, on May 21st, DWL proudly hosted the Baldcypress Bluegrass Festival at the Roman Fisher Farm on the edge of the Great Cypress Swamp. Despite deplorable weather (again), we were humbled by the outpouring of support from friends new and old who gathered for a day of great music, food, and beer!

The day's entertainment included talented local bands Kindred Spirits, New and Spare Fools, Flatland Drive, and Saltwater Stringband; and we were amazingly fortunate to have Grammy Nominee Courtney Hartman, of Della Mae fame, headlining our festival. Vinnie's Pizza Truck, B K Catering, Dogfish Head Beer, Crooked Hammock Brewery, and Nassau Valley Vineyard kept everyone's bellies full and thirst quenched throughout the day, while Jolly Trolley braved the rain to take our more intrepid guests on tours of our 10,500-acre Great Cypress Swamp.

In spite of the less-than-ideal weather, the day was a great success in raising both funds and awareness for Delaware Wild Lands. Thank you to all our sponsors, musicians, and volunteers who made the event a tremendous success!



Grammy-nominated Courtney Hartman headlined this year's DWL's Baldcypress Bluegrass Festival.

The generosity of our sponsors made this event a great success! Special thanks to: Tunnell Companies, Christopher Martin, Morris James, the Pettinaro family, TGM Group, Tidewater Utilities, and Chip and Debbie West.

Save the date for our next Baldcypress Bluegrass Festival on Saturday May 20th, 2017!





DELAWARE WILD LANDS NEWS

Our team is growing! *Meet our new staff members:*

WENDY SCOTT

Development & Marketing Manager



Wendy comes to us with more than two decades of experience in communications and fundraising. She's provided marketing services for a variety of non-profits and established companies, both as an employee and an independent consultant. In addition to Delaware Wild Lands, her work with conservation organizations includes the

Wisconsin Farmland Conservancy, The Nature Conservancy, the Delaware Center for Horticulture, and Garden Media Group, a public relations agency in Kennett Square.

Projects Wendy has written and produced have received multiple awards from the Delaware Press Association, National Federation of Press Women, and the Association for Garden Communicators.

BRENNA NESS

New Castle County Land Steward & Conservation Programs Manager



Brenna is originally from Illinois where she received a Bachelor of Science in Zoology from Southern Illinois University. In seasonal positions as a wildlife researcher, she has studied shorebirds in Maine, waterfowl and white-tailed deer in Illinois, cougars in South Dakota, and greater sage-grouse in Wyoming. She completed a Master of Science in Wildlife

Ecology from Iowa State University in 2015.

Brenna's passions lie in wildlife habitat management and educating others on the importance of quality habitat and the value of hunting. In her downtime, she enjoys spending time with her husband and two dogs or curling up with a good book.

Want to support conservation without draining your bank account?

New and creative ways to contribute

The work of a land trust is forever, which requires creative help from many sources.

Recently, DWL has received a number of non-cash contributions that are advancing our conservation work. For example, one of DWL's advisors donated office furniture to accommodate our recent hires. Another long-time supporter sold two custom-made guns and donated the proceeds to DWL. Others have donated equipment like a pickup truck, ATV, and camera; services such as paid advertising or pro bono legal services; or the proceeds from FUNdraising events like painting parties. Still others choose to support DWL via charitable IRA deductions, planned giving, office volunteer assistance, donations of stock, or legacy gifts. For more information about ways you can help, contact our Executive Director, Kate Hackett, at (302) 378-2736 or khackett@dewildlands.org.

We hope you will join us in conserving and restoring – and sustaining forever – the future of Delaware's vital farms and forests, wetlands, and wildlife habitat.



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 or by sending a check to our office.

www.delawarewildlands.org

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