



DELAWARE WILD LANDS NEWS

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The diversity of fields, forests, and farmland of the Passmore Property make it a high priority for conservation and restoration for DWL and more than 20 other conservation plans and priority lists. (Jane Mruk Photography)

DWL's Newest Acquisition and Conservation Opportunity:

Planned Purchase of the Passmore Property

Some people and properties leave an indelible mark on our cultural and physical landscapes. The Lynthwaite Farm, located in southern New Castle County, is one such place....

Driving south on Route 9, it's hard to miss the house that stands guard over this property. Like a sentry in a field, the grandeur of the house complements the complexity and diversity of habitats clustered at this property and throughout the lands and waters of Taylors Bridge and Blackbird Creek. From atop the hills of the Passmore Property, one can witness the predictable journeys of waterfowl, raptors, and shorebirds; meander through old growth forests that bear witness to hundreds of years of Delaware history; watch the splendor of emerging spring wildflowers beckoning pollinators; marvel at the simplicity of silence along Blackbird Creek; and gaze over grassland and open spaces.

So you can probably only imagine our delight in learning the daughters of Wills and Joanne Passmore might work with DWL to forever protect this gem and the landscape in which it is situated. We recognized immediately this would be a **unique opportunity to preserve the cultural and natural resources of Taylors Bridge** by working with the Passmore Family, long-time residents of Taylors Bridge and proponents of Delaware's farming and land

protection programs. Together we are now endeavoring to protect and restore high quality wildlife habitat, forests, and water resources...and expand community and volunteer engagement and citizen science opportunities in one of the most rapidly developing areas of Delaware, southern New Castle County.

The **Passmore Property is truly special** in its value for wildlife and bird species, and other flora and fauna, as well as its size (635 acres) and role in connecting a larger contiguous network of



Stately in its presentation, the Lynthwaite Farmhouse is representative of the grandeur that exists throughout the whole farm. (Eric Crosson Photography)

Notes from Kate Hackett

DWL's Executive Director

As fervent as the beginning of spring, DWL's staff is emerging from winter ready for action with new acquisition, restoration, and education projects!

Right now, we are working diligently to raise funds needed to acquire the 635-acre Passmore Property, located along Blackbird Creek in the heart of Taylors Bridge (southern New Castle County, Delaware). The Taylors Bridge geography represents some of Delaware Wild Lands' earliest and most impressive achievements and, in a way, we feel we are returning home:

with the planned acquisition of the Passmore Property, field surveys and research conducted by Sarver Ecological, water and soil improvement projects at the Roberts Farm, and continued advancement of our Wood Duck Conservation Initiative.

Elsewhere on our properties, at Milford Neck (Kent County) and the Swamp (Sussex County), freshwater forest and wetland restoration and expansion projects remain our topline priorities. This spring we planted an additional 6,000 trees at the Great Cypress Swamp and integrated into our restoration efforts a new 160-acre parcel of land donated to DWL. This property, generously given by the Smoot Family, enables us to expand our restoration efforts, enhance and improve forest resources at the Swamp, and improve water quality in the Delaware Inland Bays and Pocomoke River watersheds. We are grateful to the Smoot Family for their generous gift that will benefit us today and for generations to come!

My thanks to all of you for your support, financial contributions, good counsel, strategic guidance, and helping hands...all of which make Delaware Wild Lands' continued success possible!

We Struck Gold: *Uncommon Sightings at DWL*

The vast acreages of DWL's contiguous protected lands offer the perfect mix of seclusion, waterfowl, and upland game for...Golden Eagles! Early this spring, DWL staffers Andrew Martin and Brenna Ness each spotted a Golden Eagle; one hunting field edges at Taylors Bridge and the other over our Field 7 wetland restoration in the Great Cypress Swamp. Golden Eagles are most prevalent in the western half of North America, but are not unheard of east of the Mississippi River. Golden Eagles are larger than Bald Eagles with a broader wingspan. They also have more leg feathers than a Bald Eagle, and immature Golden Eagles have a distinct white band and dark tip on their tail and white oval patches on their wings. Adults lose their distinctive white feathers and are almost entirely brown and gray, with the same golden coloration on the head and neck.



Take Action! Get Involved in DWL's Wood Duck Conservation Initiative

Along the edges of DWL's Augustine Creek marshes, early in the spring, you may hear the high-pitched squeak of a female wood duck echoing through the marsh as a pair of wood ducks flushes from the shallow water in early April. These ducks are returning from warmer waters in the southeast U.S., in search of the perfect place to nest.

Wood ducks seek quiet streams and wetlands with protective cover. Grassy creek banks with clusters of trees are the perfect habitat. While the mucky creek bed, like quicksand in some places, and the sharp spines of dense vegetation make this area uninhabitable to us,

In the early 1900s, nest boxes were critical to helping wood ducks recover from near extinction. Today, deforestation, intensification of land use, and overdevelopment pose challenges for many species of waterfowl and wildlife. DWL's wood duck conservation initiatives does more than provide safe nesting places for wood ducks. We also manage the surrounding habitats to enhance the health and biodiversity of these protected wetland and upland ecosystems.

ducks thrive in the complex network of channels weaving through the vegetation as they feast on the diversity of invertebrates and seeds found there.

One of only two cavity nesting ducks in the Mid-Atlantic, wood ducks are often found nesting in natural tree cavities of a bottomland hardwood forest. Although tidal marshes don't offer many tree cavities, DWL has outfitted the marshes of Augustine Creek with hundreds of constructed nest boxes which wood ducks have, quite literally, flocked to.



Volunteers can participate in DWL's Wood Duck Conservation Initiative by helping build, install, and monitor wood duck boxes. Get involved by emailing Brenna at bness@dewildlands.org.

DWL's Betts and Armstrong Farms encompass more than a mile of Augustine Creek frontage that forms the core of this freshwater marsh complex. DWL first installed wood duck boxes along Augustine Creek more than 30 years ago. Dedicated volunteers have monitored and maintained these boxes ever since, collecting important data on occupancy and condition of the boxes along the way. Last year, we put that information to use by partnering with University of Delaware's Professor of Waterfowl and Wildlife Ecology, Chris Williams, to better understand how placement and condition may influence box use and nest success. This information will be helpful as we repair and replace deteriorated boxes.

In the interim, we are launching a new "Community Engagement, Habitat Improvement, and Wood Duck Conservation Initiative." The Initiative engages community members in DWL's conservation efforts by soliciting help with wood duck box construction, installation, and monitoring. We are also inviting people to learn about wood duck nesting activities by receiving updates on box use, nest success, and other data collected during the project. The Initiative and protection of the Passmore Property offer new opportunities to help DWL engage the community, advance citizen science and waterfowl research, enhance wetland habitat, and expand DWL's Wood Duck Conservation Initiative and our continued successes in land acquisition and management.



Nest boxes attract other cavity-nesting birds such as kestrels, tree swallows, and screech owls. An eastern screech owl was recently found tending her eggs in one of DWL's wood duck boxes.



Considered one of North America's most strikingly beautiful waterfowl, wood ducks are one of a few duck species equipped with strong claws that can grip bark and perch on branches.

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protected habitat that is comprised of 10,000 acres: 5,500 adjacent acres owned by the State of Delaware (the Cedar Swamp Wildlife Area) and 4,500 acres owned by Delaware Wild Lands (Taylors Bridge and Roberts Property landholdings). It is **identified as a high priority for acquisition and/or restoration in the plans of more than twenty other conservation organizations, agencies, and initiatives.**

The Passmore Property and surrounding lands and waters are comprised of **an unusual variety of coastal woodlands, old growth forest, tidal saltmarshes, and rolling fields and swales which provide valuable habitat for many threatened and rare species** of waterfowl, migratory and resident marsh birds and songbirds, insects, freshwater and salt-tolerant plants, and mammals. Rare or vulnerable bird species that have been documented near the Passmore Property include Sandhill Crane, Northern Bobwhite Quail, King Rail, American Kestrel, Short-eared Owl, Saltmarsh Sparrow (which is going extinct), Coastal Plain Swamp Sparrow, Black-necked Stilt, Seaside Sparrow, Willet, Marsh Wren, Rare Skipper (globally rare butterfly documented in only 20 other locations worldwide), Mink, and four-spotted Pennant (dragonfly).

Habitat for these species is more important to protect than ever because **this area is one the fastest growing areas of Delaware** with 206% population growth between 2000 and 2010. To understand

the magnitude of this development, consider that the local school district, the Appoquinimink School District, will be adding three new schools to accommodate the influx of students to the area.

So many people, partners, and organizations are helping DWL with this acquisition – it truly is a community project! DWL's financial advisors, Brown Advisory, created a special account for contributions received in support of this project to help maximize the purchase power of these funds. Brown Advisory is making positive differences in our community and is helping DWL advance protection of the Passmore Property by delivering strong performance, strategic advice, and exceptional client service.

Once purchase of this important property is complete, we will begin the critical work of partnering with volunteers, community members, and other organizations to harness the principles of citizen science in support of our work to protect, enhance, and restore Delaware's vital natural resources.

Engaging others in these endeavors will enable DWL to facilitate, strengthen, and expand our partnerships with the University of Delaware, Ducks Unlimited, Boy and Girl Scout Troops, Mid-Atlantic Regional

Seed Bank, Delmarva Ornithological Society, American Kestrel Partnership, Delaware Division of Fish and Wildlife and others to conduct high quality professional and citizen science research projects and educational opportunities. Please continue to visit our website and social media sites to monitor our progress in protecting this important property!



Wildlife and bird diversity at Blackbird Creek and the Passmore Property abound!



A mature whitetail buck surveys the fields of the Passmore Property. (Alexandra Nielsen Photography)

A Critical Refuge

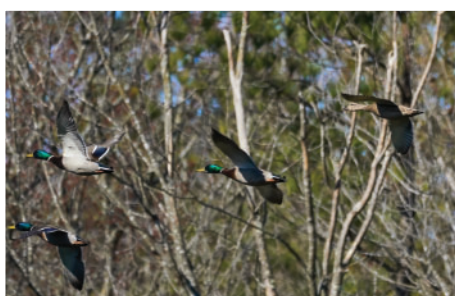
The protected lands of DWL's Taylors Bridge Complex support numerous rare and declining species of plants and animals, including over 150 species of conservation concern. Over 4,500 acres in size, this Complex includes one of the largest undisturbed tidal marshes remaining in the state and provides essential breeding habitat for the state endangered Northern Harrier and numerous other species in decline that are found in exceptionally high densities here. Even the marsh edge is vital, ecologically and biologically, as it hosts a small, orange butterfly known as the Rare Skipper that is known to exist in only about 20 locations globally.

Taylors Bridge includes several high quality forest tracts, including rare natural communities such as remnant chestnut oak bluff forest. These areas provide habitat for many breeding and migratory animals, and also home to a plethora of rare and uncommon plant species. Pollinators, including many species of butterflies and native bees, are abundant in the hedgerows, buffers, and marsh edges throughout this agricultural ecosystem. A high quality seasonal pond complex supports important breeding populations of both Spotted and Marbled Salamanders.

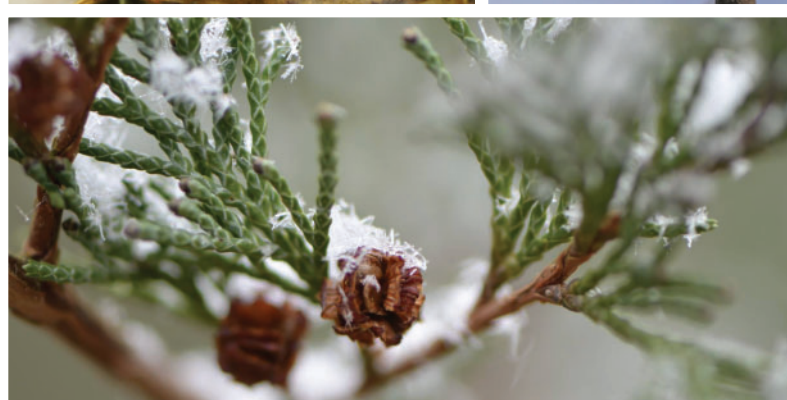
Northern Bobwhite quail, an iconic species of

agricultural landscapes, breeds in robust numbers along the hedgerows and agricultural fields. This once-common game bird has declined drastically in recent decades, and Taylors Bridge is one of the last strongholds of the species in New Castle County.

Many of the rare or declining species found at Taylors Bridge exist in relatively limited numbers because of habitat loss and fragmentation occurring in surrounding areas. Expansion of protected lands, such as the Passmore Property, and improved management and restoration can substantially enhance habitat for these species and increase resilience of these lands and waters now and long into the future.



OUT AND ABOUT ON DELAWARE WILD LANDS' PROPERTIES



DWL Completes Deadwoods Freshwater Wetlands Restoration

Project improves water quality and wildlife habitat

DWL's 3,500 acres of landholdings at Milford Neck consist of a complex of beach, salt-marsh, coastal forest, agricultural land, and freshwater wetlands crucial to a diverse array of wildlife...from the horseshoe crabs that emerge from the depths of the bay to spawn...to the migratory birds that forage and rest at Milford Neck before continuing on their long journeys. Though widely known for its natural beauty and miles of protected and undeveloped shoreline, this coastal landscape poses unique management and restoration challenges, such as increasing vulnerability to sea level rise and salt-water intrusion.

Recently, DWL completed another freshwater wetlands restoration project at Milford Neck that will improve and expand a type of freshwater wetlands known to be in decline nationally, making this project a priority at the local, State, regional, and national levels. Located in the

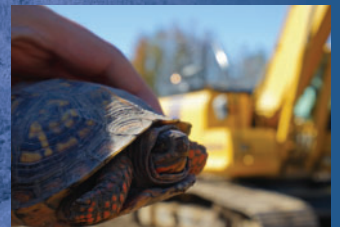
Murderkill watershed, DWL restored and expanded 12 acres of freshwater wetlands that will improve water quality, enhance wildlife habitat, and revert economically unproductive cropland to ecologically productive wetlands.

The Deadwoods Project – named for the mature trees killed by saltwater during a major storm event – was carefully designed to restore and expand historic wetlands, protect coastal forests and agricultural lands, and make the area more resilient to future saltwater intrusion at the site. Completed in partnership with Ducks Unlimited (DU), Kent County, GreenWatch Institute, and private partners, this project entailed the construction of an earthen berm and water control structure to achieve project objectives while minimizing future maintenance and repair costs.

DWL's Deadwoods wetlands restoration project, under construction here, will enhance and expand freshwater wetlands, protect agricultural and upland areas, and improve water quality.



DWL and DU review project goals and engineered plans for the 12-acre Deadwoods wetlands restoration project.



Construction can be scary even if you have a hardhat!

Vision Forestry's Larry Walton may be retired but his contributions to DWL are lasting

For more than 10 years, DWL has maintained a Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) certified forestry operation at the Great Cypress Swamp that has contributed jobs to the local economy and laid the groundwork for some of our largest and most successful forest, wetlands, and ecological restoration efforts. Looking behind the curtains of this work, one can find Larry Walton, Vision Forestry LLC's Vice President and Forester and an essential ingredient to our successes. It is with some reluctance we wish Larry the best in his retirement.

In his time working with DWL, Larry spent countless hours (days and even weeks) walking the Swamp seeking areas conducive to timber harvests and wetland restoration and getting

to know and respect the Swamp. Larry worked closely with Field Ecologists Peter Martin and Andrew Martin and Sussex County Project Manager Ron Haas coordinating timber sales, monitoring tree plantings, and even volunteering his time to speak with university classes and other groups visiting the Swamp. Truly, much of our restoration success at the Swamp is the result of Larry Walton's work ethic, knowledge, creativity, and Vision (pardon the pun).

Thank you, Larry! It is because of the hours you've logged, and what we've learned from you, that we feel confident our forestry operations will remain successful. We wish you the best in your retirement in South Carolina – and Go Tigers!



Larry Walton makes his way to high ground to monitor a recent tree planting project at DWL's Great Cypress Swamp.

Passing it on...

the Passmore daughters reminisce about their family farm

When Susan, Judy, and Cindy Passmore first approached Delaware Wild Lands about purchasing their family farm, the three sisters were looking for a way to preserve what was special about the land and to honor their parents' legacy.

Wills and Joanne Passmore both came from a long line of dairy farmers. Wills grew up working on his father's farm, known as Lynthwaite Farm, near where the Concord Mall is now located. Many in Wilmington will remember their delicious homemade ice cream. Joanne's farm roots were in Wisconsin.

In 1963, Wills and Joanne decided to leave north Wilmington for a more farm-friendly area. While some properties they looked at had richer soil or flatter fields, they loved the mixed ecology of what would become the Passmore Farm, with its upland forests, meadows, and tidal marshlands.

"It was a great place to grow up!" said Cindy Passmore Rolfe. "Our farm was a place full of adventure and things to explore because it wasn't just a bunch of fields. Mother was especially knowledgeable about plants and we did a lot of foraging. Every season we'd gather foods like wild asparagus, elderberries, mustard greens, and blackberries."

"Dad enjoyed being outside, watching wildlife and hunting and trapping," recalls Susan Passmore. "The muskrats he trapped helped put us through school. Dad also loved trees, and often told us if he hadn't been a farmer he would have become a forest ranger."

"I remember a lot of birds," said Judy Passmore. "When I drove the tractor to bale hay, I always looked for indigo buntings, bobolinks, quail, and meadowlarks. Birds like this depend on open grasslands and aren't as common anymore. Dad put up nesting boxes for bluebirds and wood ducks and barn owls. It was fun to listen for the barn owls at night."

Judy continued, "My father was concerned we wouldn't be able to find anyone to buy the farm except a huge commercial agricultural outfit. He knew that sort of agriculture would change our farm in ways he didn't want, and wouldn't preserve the woods and the marsh and the birds."

"Our family dinner table was filled with talk of thwarting oil refineries, advocating for conservation laws, appreciation for the natural resources, and the obligation we each had to be civically engaged," said Cindy. "In the evenings, our parents often attended meetings at the Grange, or the Farm Bureau, or the town hall, helping to establish Agricultural Preservation Districts in Delaware or advocating for passage of the Coastal Zone Act. They believed that conserving both wildlands and agriculture was critical to local communities and the national economy."

"Mother was a contemporary of Aldo Leopold at the University of Wisconsin, and she was exposed to a lot of emerging thinking about ecology as a student there in the 1940s," added Susan. "His famous book, *A Sand County Almanac*, was almost a bible to her."

"Selling our family farm to Delaware Wild Lands gives us peace of mind," said Judy. "We especially like that agriculture has a role in your work but that wildlife and the natural environment will be conserved as well."



The three Passmore sisters playfully recreate an old photograph from their childhood on the farm. Left to right: Susan Passmore, Cindy Passmore Rolfe, and Judy Passmore.

Ducks, and deer, and bears! Oh my!

Two Wild Game Dinners are a delicious success

The chefs at Cantwell's Tavern and Abbott's Grill outdid themselves – AGAIN – preparing gourmet feasts to delight the taste buds of DWL supporters. Guests enjoyed 5-course gourmet dinners of wild game, created exclusively for these events and paired with a featured wine or beer.

At Cantwell's Tavern, Executive Chef Amanda Nichols and Chef de Cuisine Zane Dippold served an around-the-world tour of French-inspired duck croquettes, an English-style venison stew, an Asian-fusion braised goose, and an Italian bolognese made with bear meat. Special thanks go to **M&T Bank** and **Pratt Insurance** for ensuring that our 6th annual dinner at Cantwell's was another sold-out success.

Executive Chef Kevin Reading at Abbott's Grill in Milford presented pepper-seared venison carpaccio, wild game bolognese with slab bacon, smoked duck salad, and an elk sausage meatloaf. Sponsors of our Kent County feast were **Burris Logistics**, **L&W Insurance**, **Jerry's Inc. Paving & Excavating**, **Atlantic Concrete**, and **Corrado Construction Company**.

Last but certainly not least, our thanks to the hunters who shared their bounty with us: Rob Piascinski, Eli Sharp, Scott Crawford, Bombay Hook Farm, Murray Padgett, and Carrie Lingo.



Our Wild Game Dinners are that perfect combination of good food, good friends, and a good cause.



Even the desserts featured wild game ingredients, like this apple pie with duck fat pie crust at Cantwell's Tavern.

Upcoming DWL Events

HABITAT RESTORATION AND INVASIVE SPECIES REMOVAL DAY (NEW CASTLE COUNTY)

MAY 5, 10AM-1PM

Help us Battle the Baddies by pulling garlic mustard, Japanese honeysuckle, and other invasive plants that overtake important food sources for our pollinators and wildlife.

DWL'S 3RD ANNUAL BALDCYPRESS BLUEGRASS FESTIVAL & BENEFIT (SUSSEX COUNTY)

MAY 19, 12-6PM

Five local and nationally-known bands, food trucks, local crafts, native plant sale, bus tours through the Swamp. Tickets available through DWL's website and Facebook page.

BLACKBIRD CREEK PADDLE TRIPS (NEW CASTLE COUNTY)

- APRIL 28, 11:30AM-2:30PM

- MAY 31, 3-6PM

- JUNE 30, 1:30-5:30PM

- OCTOBER 6, 9AM-1PM

Join us for a tour of DWL via kayak or canoe! The April 28th and May 31st events are bring your own boat. In June and October, boats will be provided.

PICK AND PULL AT THE SHARP FARM (NEW CASTLE COUNTY)

JULY 12, 4-7PM

Pull invasive plants and pick wineberries and blackberries to take home and bake into delicious desserts.

For more information on these and other events, be sure to follow us on Facebook! [Facebook.com/DelawareWildLands](https://www.facebook.com/DelawareWildLands)



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