



# DELAWARE WILD LANDS NEWS

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*A barn silo provides an ideal place of refuge until this barn owl alights to inspect the habitat and hunting grounds of DWL's Passmore Farm and Taylors Bridge Land Complex.*

## Accepting the Torch from the Passmore Family

*Fanning the flame of land conservation and restoration*

In some respects, the morning of June 29th was like many other summer mornings. The heat and humidity of the summer were building but the morning was still damp and fresh, reminiscent of spring and new beginnings. What was unlike other mornings, is that this day would **mark Delaware Wild Lands' acquisition of the Passmore Property** and the beginning of our stewardship of this valuable asset.

Sitting in the offices of Copeland Taylor, I was disappointed, again, that there was no universal recognition of the **greatness of acquiring conservation lands**. Despite the lack of fanfare, however, there are **no moments more special at DWL** than a moment of protecting valuable land forever. Especially when the owners were conservation heroes in Delaware, founders of Delaware's conservation movement, integral to the origination and success of the State Agricultural Preservation Program, staunch supporters of the Delaware Grange and Agricultural Extension Service, and wholly devoted to every aspect of land conservation.

The Passmore lands fortified a family with many fond memories. The Passmore daughters recall with delight foraging for edible plants with their mother and learning the principles of sustainable forestry with their father. How **this property imbued in them wonder, curiosity,**

**and hard work** while also serving as a springboard for the State Agricultural Preservation Program and need to integrate management of agricultural and natural resources. The Passmores recognized the **fundamental interconnection between people and the land**. They understood that combining food security with intentional stewardship of natural features would yield better

*"When land does well for its owner, and the owner does well by his land; when both end up better by reason of their partnership, we have conservation, but when one or the other grows poorer we do not." (Aldo Leopold)*


results for their family, their community, and all creatures that rely on the Passmore Property. For DWL, there may not be a greater honor than to have the Passmore Family entrust their family history, part of Delaware's natural and cultural history, and the future of this farm to us.

The Passmore Property is home to a plethora of life... and **taking the reins of property ownership is just the beginning!** Each time we scout DWL's newest land acquisition, we see more and learn more. Each of these encounters builds enthusiasm for the property and our role in nurturing the best parts of the property.

*Continued on page 4...*

# Notes from Kate Hackett

## *DWL's Executive Director*



*The variety and abundance of hedgerows, fields, and meadows at DWL's Sharp Farm are a favorite hunting ground for Indigo bunting.*

Not often is it that one gets to be surrounded by a group of people diverse in their talents, abilities, and interests who are **working toward – and ultimately achieve – a common yet lofty goal**. Over the past two years, as Delaware Wild Lands worked to acquire the 635-acre Passmore Property, time and time again, I met and was **greeted by heroes**: enthusiastic DWL Board members, supporters, volunteers, friends, partners, and even new people to the organization. How inspirational it's been to share conservation of the Passmore Farm -- foreseeing, envisioning, negotiating, and completing this project, all while building momentum, support for, and a deeper community commitment to land conservation and restoration! **We are more confident than ever in the future of Delaware's**

**natural resources** and that our continued conservation, restoration, and stewardship efforts will ensure the integrity and long-term vitality of these special resources. Doing so is essential to securing clean air and water, productive farms and forests, and high quality wildlife habitat, now and into the future.

Enjoy this newsletter and the overview of what we've been working on recently. What is included in **these pages represents only a small portion of what's underway at DWL**. This fall, and in the coming months, read on, follow us on Facebook and Instagram, peruse our e-blasts, get more involved, and generally indulge in the great work of this organization. **With your help we are changing Delaware in positive ways**, and it's truly my pleasure to share this work with you!

## Up from the Deep – HSC of the DE Bay

### *Ancient Rituals and Modern Research*

The sandy shores of the Delaware Bay are home to the **largest concentration of spawning horseshoe crabs (HSC) in the world**. These "living fossils" have been roaming the eastern seaboard for 445 million years, long before even dinosaurs inhabited the earth.

Every spring, hundreds of thousands of migrating shorebirds arrive on our beaches to feast on freshly-laid HSC eggs, refueling for their long journey to Arctic nesting grounds. And every spring, **for nearly 30 years, scientists and volunteers have been conducting surveys to monitor HSC populations** on 25 beaches in Delaware and New Jersey.

Historically, people utilized HSC commercially for fertilizer and as bait for

conch and eel fisheries. Today, **we rely on HSC for their unique, blue blood** that can detect the presence of toxic bacteria. Every FDA-certified drug and surgical implant must be tested using cells extracted from live HSC. If you've ever used **contact lenses or had a flu shot, you've benefitted from the blood of horseshoe crabs!**

The natural shorelines of **Milford Neck in Kent County provide some of the best HSC habitat in the world**. In partnership with The Nature Conservancy and the State of Delaware, we have protected 10,000 acres of contiguous habitat and 8 miles of beach. Crab counts are conducted on these beaches each spring, at night, coinciding with the full moon and new moon high tides. Contact DWL to get involved!



*DWL staff and volunteers conduct a survey to help monitor the HSC populations. (Photograph by Ariane Müller)*

*With your help, DWL is working to ensure the health of HSC for the next millennium by permanently protecting land and restoring coastal ecosystems at Milford Neck that will migrate inland as sea levels rise.*



# Moving Beyond Pollinator Plantings:

## *Planting with a Purpose....PLUS!*

DWL staff were busy as bees this summer working with partners and volunteers to establish pollinator habitat throughout the State of Delaware. We planted a total of 15 acres on our Betts, Liston, Roberts, and Roman Fisher Farms with a wildflower mix that will serve as an important source of nectar and seeds for bees, butterflies, birds, and other pollinators. These plantings do far more than benefit pollinators, though. Our projects also **improve water quality, train the next generation of conservationists, and increase the capacity of local and regional beekeepers.**

*Did you know 80% of all flowering plants depend on insects and other animals for pollination? Lesser known pollinators include flies, ants, beetles, bats, birds, opossums, and even lizards!*

For example, sections of agriculture fields at the Roberts Farm exhibited signs of erosion, which negatively impacts the health of the crops and soils, as well as water quality and aquatic habitats. DWL planted grasses that will:

- repair eroded areas and **reduce surface water runoff and non-point source pollution** downstream,
- **enhance and expand food and cover** for pollinators and upland wildlife, and
- **improve habitat for aquatic and terrestrial species** in the Appoquinimink River watershed.

At DWL's Roberts Farm, Girl Scout Troop 1045 worked for months to prep a former vegetable garden that had been invaded by non-native plants. The Scouts helped conduct a prescribed burn, removed invasive plants, tilled the soil, and hand-seeded the plot. **They also learned this type of project takes hard work and long-term commitment.** It can

take two or more years for wildflower seeds to emerge and become well-established, so in the meantime they will help DWL manage the garden by controlling unwanted weeds and waiting patiently!

At DWL's Roman Fisher Farm, on the edge of the Great Cypress Swamp, staff planted two acres of buffers and meadows with **wildflowers that will bloom throughout the entire growing season**, providing much-needed nectar for the wide variety of native bees and butterflies which call the Swamp their home. The resulting increases in insect activity will also provide happy **hunting grounds for flycatchers, and the State's most abundant population of Red-headed woodpeckers.**

And our most exciting pollinator news... **DWL is taking our pollinator work to the next level**, announcing a 'sweet' new partnership with Bee Natural LLC, a small apiary based in Smyrna. In response to dramatic losses in the number of active beehives in the mid-Atlantic region, Bee Natural LLC approached DWL about the possibility of expanding their "nuc" business. **DWL is providing sites for this local apiarist to raise nucleus hives or "nucs" of honey bees to supply local and regional beekeepers with these critical workers.**



*DWL is helping propagate honey bee hives by providing exceptional foraging opportunities for nucleus hives, sometimes called "nucs" or "starter hives," to increase their numbers and hardiness.*

*A new grassed waterway at DWL's Roberts Farm functions to improve water quality by reducing runoff and supplies food for wildlife.*



*DWL's Executive Director, Kate Hackett, checks on her own honey bees.*



*Girl Scouts flex their muscles while tilling the ground to prep the soil for planting.*



# Accepting the Torch from the Passmore Family

## *Fanning the flame of land conservation and restoration*

It's a bit like the early stages of courtship: full of promises and possibilities.

**The Passmore Property is a patchwork of upland habitat, diverse in form and function.** Features here attract and support an unusual number and mix of rare and vulnerable species that include Northern Bobwhite Quail, Saltmarsh Sparrow (which is going extinct), Coastal Plain Pond Sparrow (endemic to the area), mink, Rare Skipper (confirmed in only 20 other locations worldwide), and **many upland and lowland species.** Immediately adjacent to this property is DWL's 1,250-acre Roberts Farm acquired in 2015 with The Conservation Fund and Mt. Cuba Center. Though these properties share a common boundary, they are as distinctive and different from each other as the bay and beach communities of Delaware, and **together they represent some of the best wildlife habitat and biodiversity in the State.**

*DWL's Taylors Bridge Land Complex comprises .36% of the land area of Delaware but is home to 21% of Delaware's flora! In addition, the Taylors Bridge Land Complex supports more than a quarter of the 276 species of Great Conservation Need in the 13 States of the Northeast Region of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.*

Going forward DWL will extinguish remaining development potential, prohibit intensification of agricultural use and largescale poultry production, reverse habitat degradation and fragmentation, and protect old growth deciduous forest, vernal pools, and freshwater wetlands on the farm. **We see great opportunities** for facilitating better soil health; improving water resources; restoring wildlife habitat, forest, and wetland resources; and limiting use of nutrients on farmlands that are vulnerable to sea level rise.

What's more, we are **eager to begin forest and wetlands restoration projects and engaging citizen scientists and community members** of all ages to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of DWL's land management practices and restoration practices. We will be expanding our bird banding, monitoring, and nesting programs to the Passmore Farm. We will work to better understand how changes in the management and composition of field buffers impact water quality and bird life. We will strategically and selectively restore and reforest areas that will connect and expand large patches of forest within the Blackbird Creek watershed and along coastal areas of the Delaware Bay.

The work and delight of **improving and enhancing this property, now and in decades to come, has just begun.** In this next phase of enriching and expanding the variety of resources at the Passmore Farm, **we will be the architects of the future and will work together with you** and our broader community to ensure a brighter, more resilient, and more productive future for all humans and wildlife species who benefit from the Passmore Farm.



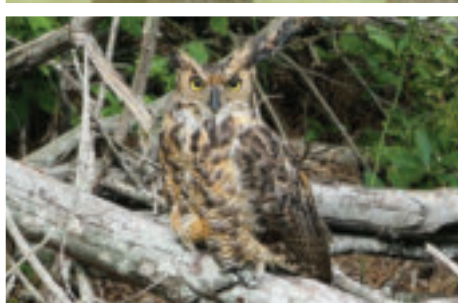
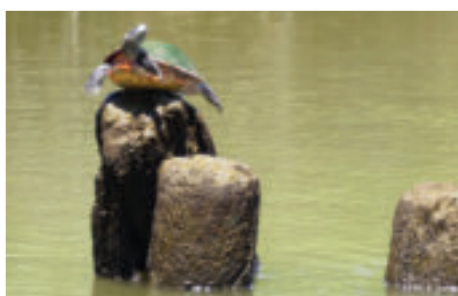
*The nesting boxes of Eastern bluebirds (and other species) will be monitored by DWL staff and volunteer citizen scientists. DWL will use collected data to improve and enhance our land management and habitat restoration activities.*

*An aerial view of the exceptional natural and diversity of wildlife habitat that comprise DWL's Passmore Farm.*

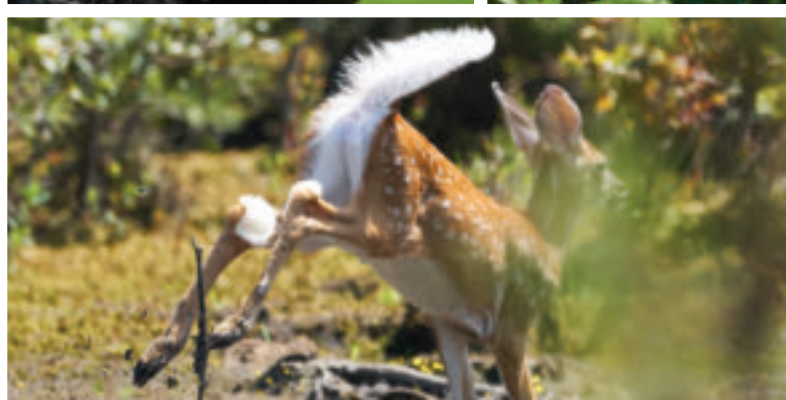
*DWL and the critters and creatures that depend on our work are grateful to the many donors and contributions that made this exceptional project possible, including:*

- Mt. Cuba Center
- Longwood Foundation
- Crestlea Foundation
- Welfare Foundation
- Ellice and Rosa McDonald Foundation
- Fair Play Foundation
- Delmarva Ornithological Society
- Shrieking Meadow Foundation
- Marmot Foundation
- Copeland Taylor LLC
- GreenWatch Institute
- Green Grants Program
- And the many individuals who contributed their time, talent, and treasure!





# OUT AND ABOUT ON DELAWARE WILD LANDS' PROPERTIES





# Honoring the past, conserving for the future

## *160-acre Smoot family donation expands 10,600-acre Great Cypress Swamp*

The Smoot family has appreciated the nature and wildlife of Sussex County (and beyond) for generations. "There's no doubt in my mind that my mother would be **delighted to see her property permanently preserved**," said Catherine Smoot. "She loved being outdoors and often took all five of us kids camping and hiking. Even late in her life she'd get excited about seeing wildlife like geese, deer, turtles, or foxes."

Adjacent to DWL's holdings in the Great Cypress Swamp, the Smoot property was **owned by the family for more than 100 years**. Catherine's mother, Nancy Lee Smoot, inherited it from her parents, George Massey Gum and Catherine Jay Gum, who

lived in Frankford, Delaware. "My grandfather used to hunt on the property, and my grandmother taught me how to drive on those dirt roads, in their old Chevrolet Corvair," said Catherine.

Catherine and her siblings are especially pleased their **land donation expands the protected acreage of the Great Cypress Swamp** owned by DWL. "The Swamp is a beautiful hidden gem in Delaware – home to so many birds and different creatures," she said. "As development has migrated inland, these large tracts of land that harbor wildlife become even more special. It's exciting how **our land has become one little part of your big beautiful vision**."

*The Smoot family tract will expand DWL's forest and wetlands restoration efforts at the Great Cypress Swamp, pictured above.*

## DWL's Annual Baldcypress Bluegrass Festival:

### *Soggy but Successful*

In spite of the 10 inches of rain that fell in the week before the event, our 3rd Annual Baldcypress Bluegrass Festival **overflowed with great music and 300+ enthusiastic guests!** Ominous clouds held off during the festival and the crowd came prepared for mud.

This benefit event was held at our scenic Roman Fisher Farm at the edge of the Great Cypress Swamp. We own and manage 10,700 acres of the Swamp, **the largest forest on the Delmarva Peninsula, and we've planted 198,000 trees here.**

Humans weren't the only ones enjoying bluegrass music that day. At one point, a family of **black rat snakes surprised almost everyone** when they plummeted from the branches of a large tree next to the beer tent. Thankfully, a nearby wildlife biologist leapt into action. After an impromptu nature lesson, these swamp-goers were gently relocated safely away from festival guests.



*Festival bands delivered thrilling music, including that of Johnny Staats & the Delivery Boys, our nationally-recognized headliner from West Virginia. Regional bluegrass greats Flatland Drive (pictured here), Mountain Ride, Acoustic Turnpike, and New & Spare Fools provided an energetic mix of fast pickin' and old and new ballads.*

**We couldn't have hosted this event without our wonderful sponsors. A special thank you goes out to each of them:**

- Sandpiper Energy, a subsidiary of Chesapeake Utilities
- Dogfish Head Beer
- Ocean View Builders
- Dr. Chris Martin & Dr. Grace Wang
- J.G. Townsend, Jr. & Co.
- Tunnell Companies L.P.
- Delmarva Public Radio
- Morris James
- Tidewater Utilities
- DE Storage
- Chip & Debbie West
- Coastal Kayaks
- Coastal Tented Events
- Nassau Valley Vineyards
- How Sweet It Is Garden Center



# What's that Wading in the Water?

Words cannot describe the **dramatic transformation of DWL's Field 7 restoration site** into one of Delaware's most vast and diverse freshwater wetlands – and DWL staff aren't the only ones who have noticed these dramatic changes! Every year, we have **sightings of new and interesting wildlife** making use of our restored wetlands. This year, we had a remarkable visitor, one rarely seen as far north as Delaware. The Wood Stork (*Mycteria americana*) typically ranges from Central America, along the Gulf Coast, and up through Florida, Georgia, and the Carolinas. Sightings north of central North Carolina are rare. In August, Field Ecologist Andrew Martin spotted and photographed one of **these unusual birds** among a group of other wading birds more common to Delaware.



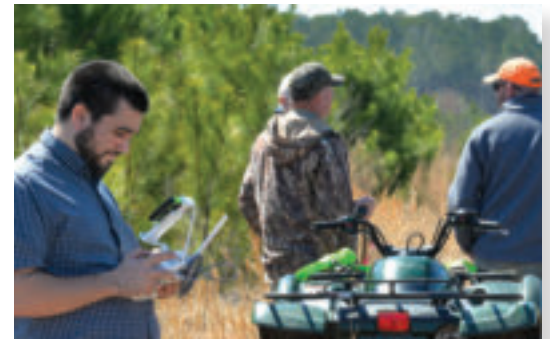
*Wood Stork (foreground) and Great Egret (background) foraging in Field 7.*

## The Changing Face of Forestry at the Great Cypress Swamp

Since we began our foray into certified sustainable forestry, our goals have been complex and multi-faceted. Sometimes we use forestry as the first step of a wetland or forest enhancement effort, and every timber harvest offers opportunities to further advance restoration. Though there is no substitute for an experienced, licensed forester, DWL staff have spent years studying, reading, observing, and learning from our forestry mentors and we are now taking a more active role in the management of our forests. With new and rapidly emerging technologies, we are now able to internalize more of the planning and mapping involved in timber operations at the Great Cypress Swamp.

GPS field units are now accurate enough to create precise maps of timber and restoration sites, and our drone allows us to quickly produce up-to-date imagery (a development which has been crucial to the success of our Atlantic white-cedar restoration efforts). Additionally, we can now “lay” our own drone imagery over data collected in the field to create more data-driven and accurate maps we need for our restoration projects.

By leveraging our own staff's access to technology and field expertise, we are able to internalize more of our forestry operations and operate more efficiently. This means more of our staff time and revenue generated from forestry goes directly into our continued mission to preserve, protect, and enhance Delaware's natural beauty.



*DWL's Andrew Martin prepares our drone for a reconnaissance mission in preparation for planting 6,000 trees at the Great Cypress Swamp.*



*Aided by technology, our tree plantings are more effective and quicker given these atypical tree-planting conditions and unusual landscape features. Note the tree planters in this picture in the lower right-hand corner.*

# DWL Board of Directors: *Eli R. Sharp*

Growing up on a farm in Chester County and spending summers among the vast landscapes and timeless character of the Sand Hills in Nebraska, Eli developed an understanding of land and its value, learned well the importance of hard work, and quickly gained an appreciation for how nature can inspire (and sometimes humble) those who attend to and depend on our natural resources and working landscapes.

As a young man Eli attended the University of Colorado, broadening his knowledge of history and expanding his awareness of the outdoors. In 2001, Eli returned to the Brandywine Valley and moved to Delaware, the location he and his wife selected to raise their family. Perhaps it was time spent on his family's ranch or his formative years in the Rocky Mountains or fond memories of his grandfather's outdoor, hunting, and fishing forays that sparked Eli's interest in wildlife

habitat and land conservation...or perhaps all these forces together forged Eli's deep commitment to conservation. Regardless, Eli has always respected the indelible connection between history and the natural environment.

Though sometimes reserved in demeanor, Eli is persistent and has an affinity for excellence in financial and environmental stewardship. This, combined with his keen commitment to advancing and improving the economic and environmental productivity of landscapes, is benefiting Delaware Wild Lands in the Board Room and on the ground. Eli is staunchly focused on results and impacts, holding DWL's conservation and restoration work to high standards and ensuring our efforts yield positive and measurable outcomes. Eli joined DWL's Board of Directors in 2009 and his contributions continue to strengthen and improve DWL's work by helping focus our work to achieve



results that will benefit present and future generations in Delaware and beyond.

In addition to serving on the Board of Delaware Wild Lands, Eli supports the region with his service as Trustee and Board member of the Longwood Foundation, Mt. Cuba Center, Community Education Building, and Christiana Care Health Systems. He lives in Centreville with his wife and two children.

## Charitable IRAs for DWL

*By Ian Sloan, Chandler Nichol and Sloan, Certified Public Accountants*

**Retirees over the age of 70.5 can receive tax benefits** for charitable contributions in 2018 even if they do not itemize their deductions simply by utilizing qualified charitable distributions (QCDs).

**Up to \$100,000 can be distributed directly to qualified non-profit organizations** from Traditional, Rollover, Inherited, SEP, and SIMPLE IRAs, and this distribution will not be included as taxable income for the IRA owner. As an added benefit, the QCD satisfies the required

IRA distribution requirements, allowing the IRA holder to minimize the taxable impact of required distributions by giving to their favorite 501c3 organizations directly from their IRA. This is an important tax planning opportunity for retirees in 2018 and beyond with the much larger standard deduction that many taxpayers will be utilizing.

For more information, contact DWL Executive Director Kate Hackett at (302) 378-2736 or [khackett@dewildlands.org](mailto:khackett@dewildlands.org).

*There are other ways you can support DWL: host a coffee, brunch, lunch, informal dinner (small or large), cocktails, or a casual cookout...and we will provide the entertainment!*



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