



DELAWARE WILD LANDS NEWS

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This aerial photograph shows how the water in the channelized sections of the Pocomoke River can now cross the muddy flats to enter historic floodplains where this water will be naturally filtered and slowly released back into the main stem of the river.

Nature Has No Boundaries, Neither Should Restoration

A Productive Partnership for Floodplain Restoration Along the Pocomoke River

When people think of Delaware Wild Lands, one of the first things that comes to mind is... well... Delaware. What you may not know, is **DWL's landholdings spill over the Delaware state line into Maryland**, and so do our ambitions for wetland restoration! DWL's 10,600-acre Great Cypress Swamp is known for being the largest contiguous forest in Delaware, and is actually so large that about 1,000 acres of DWL's Great Cypress Swamp cross into Wicomico and Worcester Counties in Maryland along the Pocomoke River.

Historically, the Great Cypress Swamp served as a major portion of the headwaters of the Pocomoke, and although much of the Swamp now drains through Vines Creek into the Delaware Inland Bays, portions of the Swamp feed into the Chesapeake Bay through the Pocomoke River. Though the quality of water in both these watersheds is on the rise due to regulatory and restoration efforts, much work remains to be done.

This work is especially important considering how increased rainfall and storm intensity are affecting water quality, riparian habitat, and the land and water resources enjoyed by millions of people each year.

Once an important trading route for Native Americans, the Pocomoke River was channelized in the 1930s to promote increased drainage and agricultural production

of adjacent lands. What we didn't know then was that these actions would also cause decades of increased erosion, downstream flooding, impaired water quality, and degraded habitat. As a result of historic drainage and channelization, **thousands of acres of wetland habitat have been lost**, including the very habitat DWL is working to restore throughout southern Delaware: the unique and beautiful Baldcypress swampland that once dominated the Great Cypress Swamp and areas beyond.

Once reconnected with their natural floodplain, waters of the Pocomoke River will be able to spread, unimpeded, across adjacent lands slowing the flow of the water. This helps prevent downstream flooding and filters sediment and pollutants from these waters to improve water quality.

To combat a century of degradation, and make real and positive changes in water quality and habitat across the Delmarva Peninsula, DWL is pleased to team up with The Nature Conservancy in Maryland (TNC in MD) and Ducks Unlimited (DU) to reverse these trends and make **changes that will positively impact the health and welfare of humans and wildlife alike.**

Continued inside...

Notes from Kate Hackett

DWL's Executive Director

Across the many lands and waters owned by DWL, the **welcome signs of spring are rapidly emerging!** At DWL, our staff, volunteers, interns, farmers, hunters, and helpers from across the State are also ramping up for spring as we work to accommodate new pairings of waterfowl and wildlife; nurse new pollinator plantings in support of imperiled insects and food sources of wildlife; and recover, restore, and expand critical and degraded habitat. Each of these efforts, and all our efforts at DWL, are **highly strategic in their placement, timing, and location.** We take pride in **combining our knowledge of and experience in the landscape** with using the newest science and data available to ensure the greatest success possible. Our work with partners like the University of Delaware, Ducks Unlimited, Delaware Division of Fish & Wildlife, and Delaware National Estuarine Research Reserve ensure we know where and how to best place and orient nest boxes; identify the most advantageous location for floodplain and wetlands restoration using water flow and runoff analyses; meaningfully engage the next generations of scientists, researchers and conservationists; and use tools of sustainable forestry to increase biodiversity and forest complexity.



The calls of tree frogs and spring peepers will soon beckon us outside!

Completing this, and more, with a staff of seven is no small undertaking! So you know when you support DWL, **you are supporting conservation work that has tangible impacts.** I am grateful for a team of incredibly talented and dedicated staff, a Board of Directors who are strategic and smart and who keep us tightly focused on our mission, and **people like you who are the backbone** of how and why we do our work! We are growing and expanding our protected lands, conservation work, and engagement with our community and couldn't do this without YOU. We asked for help and you answered -- and we are pleased to share this overview of recent accomplishments and upcoming projects.

Up North and Down South: DWL's Reforestation Projects

Named for the famous pirate of the 17th century, Blackbeard, Blackbird Creek is unlike most other tributaries and creeks of Delaware. It remains relatively pristine, and is one of the only unditched, unstraightened creeks flowing from Delaware into the Delaware Bay. Threatened by rapid commercial and residential development in and around nearby Middletown, Blackbird Creek flows through a network of farms, forests, and wetlands that supports a diversity of native species. With one of our most important partners and neighbors, the Delaware National Estuarine Research Reserve, **DWL helped plant 340 mature native trees in one of the most important remaining natural landscapes** on the Delmarva Peninsula - the Blackbird-Millington Corridor.

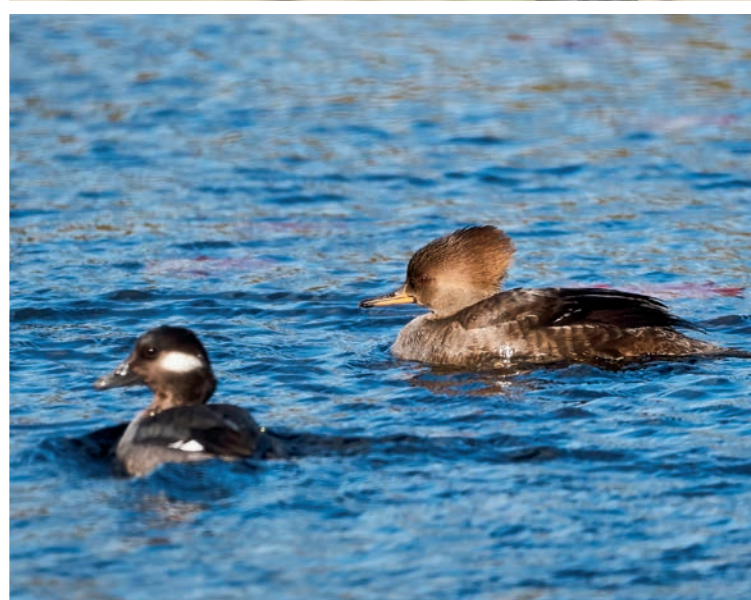
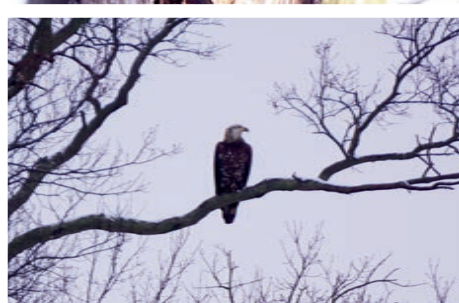
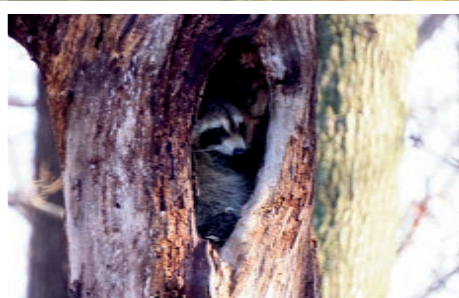
Unsatisfied with that project alone, **we planted an additional 4,500 Baldcypress and Atlantic white cedar trees at the Great Cypress Swamp.** These trees were interspersed throughout our Field 7 wetland restoration site and several smaller intermittent areas targeted for restoration with the goal of promoting improved age and species diversity -- and longevity -- within this vast forest. Up north and down south, these forest restoration projects enrich and expand habitat for wildlife, aid in the fight against climate change, increase flood water storage capacity, and enhance air and water quality.



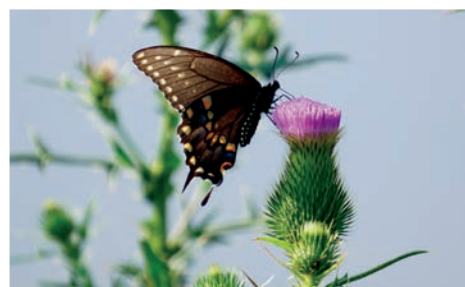
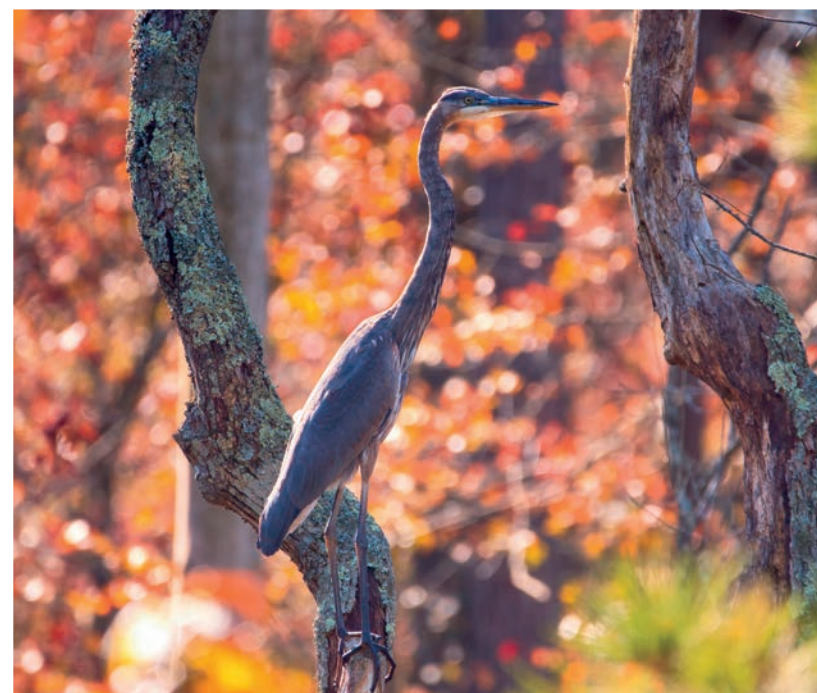
A newly planted Baldcypress seedling at DWL's Great Cypress Swamp property in Sussex County, DE.

Partners, staff, and crew prepare for tree-planting last spring.





OUT AND ABOUT ON DELAWARE WILD LANDS' PROPERTIES



The Mysterious American Kestrel Decline

DWL and the Partnership on the Case

Populations of American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*) in the Mid-Atlantic region have declined nearly 90% in the last 50 years. The Delaware Kestrel Partnership (DKP) formed in 2016 in response to this decline, and **DWL was one of the first organizations to sign on!** (See our first article about this partnership in our Fall 2015 newsletter.) Our goals are to increase the productivity and success of breeding kestrels by installing nest boxes, creating nesting habitat, and then **assessing and improving the effectiveness of these efforts.** Ultimately, we hope to shed light on the decline of this state-endangered raptor, which likely is caused by

pesticide accumulation, loss of habitat, and increased predation.

In 2018, 72 nest boxes were monitored state-wide, 12 of which are located on DWL's conserved lands. Kestrels were observed near 6 of the 12 boxes installed on DWL properties. Unfortunately, European starlings, a non-native, invasive species, consistently out-competed kestrels for use of the boxes.

Long-term monitoring is key to understanding the issues plaguing kestrel populations. DKP is hoping to **expand the nest box program**, particularly in Kent and Sussex Counties. By supporting this program, DWL hopes to **help solve the mystery of kestrel decline**

and protect the species from disappearing forever. For more information about how you can get involved, contact DWL at info@dewildlands.org or 302-378-2736.



A female kestrel guards her nest in a box monitored by the DKP.



Jordan Terrell checks a kestrel nest box on DWL's Betts Farm.

Friends, Fundraising, and Feasting:

Another Sold-Out Soiree

DWL's Sixth Annual Wild Game Dinner at Cantwell's Tavern

The talents of Cantwell's Tavern were on display once again, under the guidance of Executive Chef Zane Dippold and his outstanding staff. Raise a glass or two and toast the dedicated and enthusiastic crowd that joined us for the 6th annual Game Dinner at Cantwell's Tavern. **Great food, great oysters, and great pairings coupled with an energetic group of supporters and sponsors** created a sold-out crowd. Diners started the evening with a wild game charcuterie board sampling goose pate, cured elk, cheeses, house-made brioche crostini... and finished the evening with a delicious trifle made with duck fat!

Elk bourguignon with alder smoked bacon and pea tendrils and citrus-roasted duck rounded out a few of the main courses. The 5-course meal was a true treat for the taste buds!

This fundraising feast highlights the importance of protecting and restoring wetlands and wildlife habitats, and healthy farms and forests. Our sincere thanks to **M&T Bank**, our presenting sponsor, and **Pratt Insurance** and **Brown Advisory**. Special thanks goes to Murray Padgett, Carrie Lingo, Bombay Hook Farm, Brad du Pont, and Rob Piascinski for their hunting skills and bounty.

Cantwell's Executive Chef and staff prepare the wild game charcuterie board.

Andrew Martin, DWL's Sussex County field ecologist, spoke about our restoration work at the Great Cypress Swamp and the importance of our sustainable forestry initiatives, and Matt Sarver of Sarver Ecological provided first-hand testament to the importance of DWL's work.



Game dinner guests enjoy Cantwell's culinary prowess with lively conversation and libations.

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Nature Has No Boundaries, Neither Should Restoration

A Productive Partnership for Floodplain Restoration Along the Pocomoke River

DWL's participation in restoring the natural floodplains of the Pocomoke River enables TNC in MD and DU to expand the success they have achieved downstream, working with private landowners to reconnect the channelized portions of the Pocomoke River with its natural floodplain. Since the beginning of this groundbreaking project, which began in 2012, this partnership has grown to include the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the France-Merrick Foundation, the U.S. Geological Survey, Maryland Department of Natural Resources, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife, numerous private landowners...and now DWL!

On the ground, this work will entail strategically reducing the elevation of berms on either side of the Pocomoke River (which were formed from the excavation and relocation of sediment from the bottom of the river during channelization) to **restore the natural connection and "communication" between the river and its floodplain.** The benefits of this work are

two-fold: firstly, during extreme rainfall and flooding events, these new outlets into the Pocomoke River will allow for floodwaters to more efficiently make their way into the river and eventually out into the bay helping to prevent flooding of adjacent agricultural lands, communities, and upland forest. Secondly, when we aren't facing extreme weather, these lowered berms will allow intermittent tidal flooding of the natural floodplain, restoring hundreds or even thousands of acres of wetlands surrounding the River, **improving water quality and allowing a diverse array of wetland-dependent flora and fauna to flourish.**

Floodplain restoration work on DWL lands will commence late this Summer or early Fall, adding our acreage to a project that has already successfully restored over 2,000 acres of private and public lands along the Pocomoke River; returning it to a state where it will **create new habitat, collect floodwaters, and help clean waters** that flow into the Chesapeake Bay!



These floodplain and wetlands enhancement projects will benefit waterfowl, wildlife, and insects, including this Zebra Swallowtail.



Before the arrival of our project team, a curious river otter inspected one of our restoration sites.

Conservation Partners Band Together

By Justyn Foth, DNREC Division of Fish & Wildlife Gamebird Biologist

As the state gamebird biologist, I am tasked with **monitoring both migratory** (i.e., waterfowl, doves, woodcock, and other web-less species) **and non-migratory** (i.e., wild turkey and quail) bird species. One tool I use to monitor these important species is banding waterfowl and mourning dove populations during three main periods: nesting period (April-July), pre-hunting season (July-August), and post-hunting season (February-March).

Small silver bands placed loosely around a bird's leg display a unique identification number that, when reported, is used by migratory bird biologists to track that bird's migration and nesting patterns.



This year, Brenna Ness, DWL's New Castle County Land Steward, and I worked together to **expand the State's bird banding efforts to include wood duck populations.** Today it is hard to believe this beautiful waterfowl species nearly went extinct in the early 20th century due

to lack of habitat resulting from deforestation. Wood ducks are cavity nesters and historically used abandoned tree cavities created by other wildlife. Since the 1930s, wildlife biologists have been placing wood duck boxes across the landscape. Today, this work continues with wood duck box building events like Delaware Ducks Unlimited's Greenwing Event and DWL's Wood Duck Conservation Initiative. Participants in these events often ask, "Will the wood duck that nested in my box this year be the same bird that uses it next year?" As waterfowl typically return to the same habitats year after year, and some even to the same nesting bowl, the answer is likely to be "Yes" unless competition for limited nesting cavities prevents use of the same box from one year to the next.

The 2018 nesting season was the first year we captured hens in boxes, successfully capturing five individuals. It will be interesting to see if those marked birds return to the same or nearby boxes during the 2019 nesting season and beyond. If you would like to increase your nest box success, contact us at info@dewildlands.org or 302-278-2736.



One of 20 wood duck boxes recently installed at DWL's Roberts Farm.

Once this hen was banded, she was immediately released, and she later returned to her nest box.

Native Plant Species Profile:

American Beech (Fagus grandifolia)

Contributed by Ron Haas, DWL Sussex County Project Manager

American Beech is native to the eastern half of the United States. Preferring deep, rich, well-drained soils, Beech trees are a medium to large tree that can grow to 100 feet tall. Beech trees can be found on many DWL properties, from drier sand ridges in the Great Cypress Swamp, to the majestic bluffs overlooking the Appoquinimink River at the Sharp Farm.

Beech trees can reproduce sexually by seed, or "beech nuts", or asexually via root suckering. Flowers appear in early spring when leaves are about half grown, and both male and female flowers occur on the same tree. The yellow-green male flowers are approximately one inch in diameter, hanging from long stems, while the female flowers usually occur in pairs supported by a short hairy stem. By early autumn, there are two or three small triangular

edible nuts encased in a small prickly bur. Hikers and bow hunters may notice **increased Squirrel activity around Beech trees** as they wait expectantly for Beech nuts to fall.

The bark of the Beech tree is smooth and gray, **covering the trunk and branches like skin.** Because of this thin bark, Beech tree trunks are often found with initials or other markings carved into them. These scars will grow wider, but not taller as the tree grows over time.

Beech leaves in the summer are a glossy, blue-green color with a parallel venation. Leaves are simple with a toothed margin and alternate on the stem. Beech trees also exhibit marcescence, meaning their leaves are not cast off in the Fall. The light-coppery color of the Beech leaves can add a **strikingly beautiful dimension to an otherwise drab winter forest.**



Looking up the trunk of a nearly 100' tall Beech tree in the Great Cypress Swamp.



A Beech tree demonstrates marcescence, with leaves still clinging to its branches in the dead of winter.

Upcoming DWL Events

SOUTHERN DELAWARE OYSTERFEST

APRIL 6, 12-3PM

Taking place at the Beacon Motel in Lewes, DE and sponsored by Jack Lingo, REALTOR to benefit Delaware Wild Lands & The Greater Lewes Foundation

LISTON POINT BEACH CLEAN-UP

APRIL 27, 10AM-1PM

Remove plastics and other waste, while providing healthier habitat for terrapins, horseshoe crabs, and other wildlife

GARLIC MUSTARD PULL & FORAGE

MAY 4, 1-4PM

Restoring forest habitat by removing invasive garlic mustard

PICK AND PULL AT THE SHARP FARM

JULY 11, 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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