

FALL 2021

# NEWS

# Delaware **Wild Lands**



D E L A W A R E W I L D L A N D S . O R G

## NOTES FROM

# Kate Hackett

Delaware Wild Lands'  
Executive Director



*Imagine you just stepped onto a moving walkway at the airport, and think about the very moment you place your foot on the walkway...that split second when you go from being ambulatory to accelerated and the pace at which you are moving quickens substantially. Your shoulders push back, your midcourse tightens for stabilization, and your feet gain momentum quickly.*

Welcome to Delaware Wild Lands where, in our 60th anniversary this year, we stepped on the moving walkway. We have new leadership from the younger generations of the families that launched DWL and a new Board member who is inspired by the community and conservation work of DWL.

With rapid development occurring throughout the State of Delaware, Delaware Wild Lands is significantly accelerating our land protection and restoration work, recognizing the imperative we have to move more quickly than before to protect and restore Delaware's wildlife habitat and natural resources. This year alone, among other projects, we are planting a record number of trees at our Great Cypress Swamp and Taylors Bridge properties. We restored more than 80 acres of wetlands in Sussex County. We completed two high priority land protection projects, and have a third underway. We hosted socially-distanced volunteer opportunities and property tours. By year end, we will have met and exceeded all our goals for 2021.

This year, we are celebrating DWL's 60th anniversary. We successfully achieved and exceeded the goals and projects we laid out in our 2021 Conservation Agenda...AND with the acquisition of the Fortner Farm we have officially protected more land in the past 10 years than we protected in the previous 20 years.

As we accelerate DWL's critical protection and restoration work, new staff members are joining us in this journey. After more than 15 years of dedicated service, Debbie Turner retired and Brenna Ness and her husband returned to their roots in the Midwest. We will forever be grateful for their time and talents, and in this newsletter I am pleased to introduce our new staff members: Al Rizzo, Kim Staska, and Brigham Whitman.

Please read on about the tangible outcomes and the high-impact conservation work we undertake each day. Support this work. It's deeply gratifying. DWL's initiatives quickly surpass the mundanity of one day's work and hold a promise to safeguard the landscapes that will forever define our future and the iconic beauty of Delaware.

Cover Photo: Mallard ducks lift off from DWL's field 7 restoration site at the Great Cypress Swamp.

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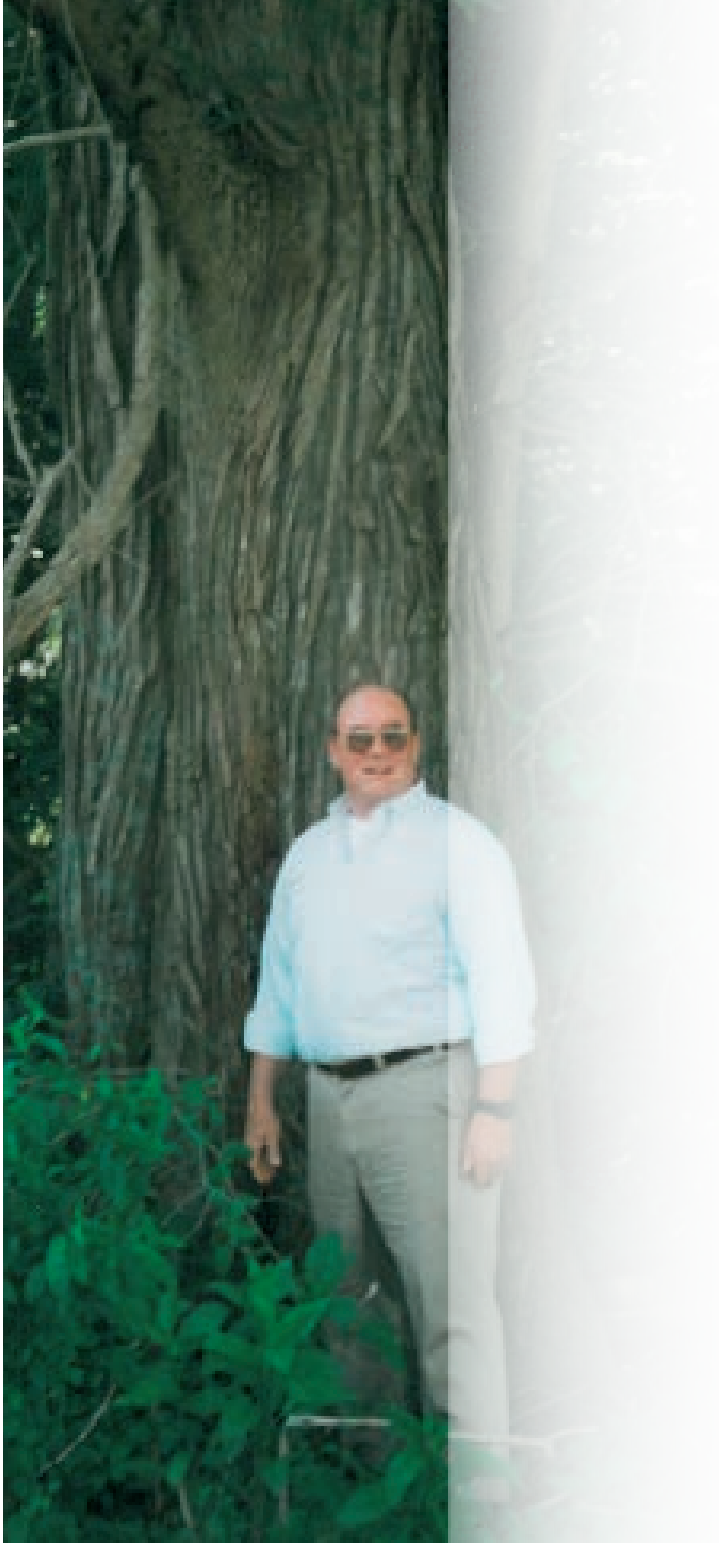
## DIRECTORS EMERITI

ROBERT L. EDGELL

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CAROLINE PRICKETT

# Charles F. Gummey Jr. (1941 – 2020)



Last winter Delaware Wild Lands (DWL) lost a great advocate and treasured friend, Charlie Gummey. Charlie served on Delaware Wild Lands' Board of Directors from 1986 to 2020 in many leadership roles including the President of the Board of Directors. He was a steadfast proponent of DWL's work and a trusted advisor with a keen sense of strategy and direction. If anyone had the golden touch, it was Charlie. Though we are deeply saddened by Charlie's passing, we are also immensely grateful for and appreciative of his decades-long service and commitment to conservation and building a strong community around DWL and our work.

Certainly, Delaware Wild Lands' results-driven approach, high impact conservation work, and organizational strength are the products of Charlie's long-time involvement. Charlie was a man with commanding presence and strong physical stature. Though he easily dominated a room, he was also gentle and even nurturing in character.

**His quick wit, easy-going and participatory approach, and prowess around the DWL Board table consistently yielded productive discourse, impactful outcomes, and supportive consensus. Charlie commanded respect and held himself and others to high standards.**

At DWL, Charlie scrutinized project and program reports, provided oversight, and always elicited involvement and discussion, knowing well the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

Charlie's contributions were not limited to only DWL. He served in notable leadership positions at the Wilmington Trust Company and on the governing Boards of Tower Hill School, the Boys and Girls Club of Delaware, the Delaware Chapter of Ducks Unlimited, and the Wilmington Club. He was also a gifted athlete, inducted into Washington & Lee University's Athletics Hall of Fame, and an ardent fan of University of Delaware and Tower Hill sports.

A man of exceptional integrity and loyalty, Charlie was the consummate coach on the sports field, in a duck blind, around the Board table, and during informal conversations. If DWL can be measured by the company we keep, there is no greater compliment than Charlie's decades of involvement in our work and organization.

Charlie's talent, humor, and insight remain cherished at DWL. He continues to influence our work every day, and will forever be a valued part of Delaware Wild Lands' past and future.





# Groundbreaking Partnership Protects 225 Acres

DWL, New Castle County, Mt. Cuba Center, DOS, and others join in the effort!

Earlier this year, as a kick-off for DWL's 60th anniversary capital campaign, a robust partnership of organizations, agencies, and individuals worked with DWL to complete the first of DWL's 60th anniversary land conservation and restoration projects: permanent protection of the Fortner Farm, located in southeastern New Castle County.

Situated between Port Penn and Route 13, and adjacent to DWL's 1,300-acre Augustine Creek Complex, the Fortner Farm, and surrounding lands and waters, are more important to protect than ever because of increasing threats to critical natural resources and wildlife habitat. This geographic area is considered to be one of the fastest growing areas in Delaware, with the Middletown area experiencing a 272% population growth between 2000 and 2019. Other threats to the natural resources, wildlife habitat, and this property include intensification of land use, habitat degradation and

fragmentation, removal of old growth forest, and sea level rise. These threats put in peril natural resources that provide improved water and air quality, stormwater protection, local sources of food production, wildlife habitat, and a variety of coastal woodlands, old growth forest, tidal saltmarshes, and rolling fields and swales that provide valuable habitat for many threatened and rare species. Imperiled species documented in and around the Fortner Farm include, among others, King Rail, American Kestrel, Saltmarsh Sparrow (which is going extinct), Semipalmated Sandpiper, Black-Necked Stilt, American Black Duck, and Northern Harrier. This project also supports the first confirmed population of resident Sandhill cranes in Delaware, as well as countless other species of mammals, herps, reptiles, insects, and fish. Finally, Augustine Creek watershed has been identified by the Delaware State Botanist, Bill MacAvoy, as having "the best example of old growth forest remaining in the State of Delaware".



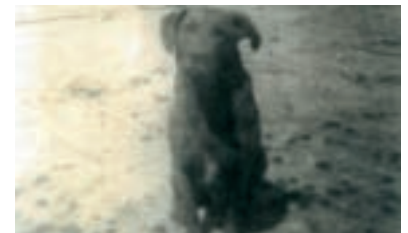
*The 225-acre Fortner Farm is part of DWL's Augustine Creek Land Complex with Augustine Creek pictured in the background. Image provided by New Castle County*

Augustine Creek and the marsh “fingers” that run in and around the Fortner Farm increase the ratio of land contributing directly to local waterways, making protection of this property especially important for improving water quality, as more than 90% of all waterbodies in the state are too polluted to meet their designated uses.

DWL, and other conservation partners, identified this property long ago as a high priority for protection, securing the agricultural and pastoral heritage in the area, safeguarding critical wildlife habitat for waterfowl and migratory birds, stabilizing old growth forest, and enhancing water quality. We are grateful to members of the Fortner Family, for their stewardship of this beautiful property over the generations, and for their patience as DWL worked with our partners and supporters to raise the funds needed for this acquisition. A hearty thanks to the broad coalition that made this project possible: the invaluable contribution and commitment of New Castle County (which purchased a permanent conservation easement on this land), the transformational leadership of Mt. Cuba Center, Delaware Ornithological Society’s Bird-a-thon for their commitment to habitat protection and their contribution to (another) on-the-ground habitat protection project, Copeland Taylor LLC, DMS Real Estate, and many community members who value the iconic character and wildlife of the Augustine Creek watershed and the State of Delaware.



*This large American beech tree located at the Fortner Farm is characteristic of the old growth there.*



*These old photographs from the Fortner Farm were shared with DWL from the family archives, and will help capture and forever record the history of the property.*

## A few shared memories of life at the Fortner Farm:



Remember evenings huddled around the TV, watching Ed Sullivan and seeing The Beatles?

As the youngest grandchild, I remember how that the cuckoo clock in the living room SCARED me!

I think about Nana, in her room upstairs, and how her unpinned hair cascaded toward the floor.

Hot summer evenings were often spent racing through the front yard and splashing each other from the washtub.

*One summer evening in July, four cousins reunited to share memories of their childhood summers at the Fortner Farm, sharing laughter, childhood memories, and exclamations that reverberated over the fields and across the marsh. Two months earlier, other Fortner family members waited patiently while DWL worked diligently to raise the funding needed to protect the critical lands and waters of this special property. Many thanks to the generations of Fortner Family members, past and present, who contributed to this great success!*





## ACQUISITIONS

# Protecting Mispillion Harbor's Shorebird Habitat: The Missing Piece

Like assembling the pieces of a puzzle, land protection projects sometimes fall into place easily and quickly while others are more demanding and require multiple attempts from multiple partners before they come together.

Located in Kent County along the shores of the Delaware Bay, Mispillion Harbor, is well known (by humans, horseshoe crabs, and birds alike) for being one of the most important foraging and resting stops for migratory shorebirds on the Delaware Bayshore and for being globally important for the migration of shorebirds across the hemispheres. This important site is well documented as serving a critical role in supporting the needs of the Federally-listed threatened Red Knot and other imperiled shorebird species. In recent years, 80% of the entire Red Knot population has been recorded at Mispillion Harbor – just a one-mile long stretch of shoreline. There are but a few other areas in the world that are similar in size and that provide a vital link to the survival of an entire species of bird!

For nearly 15 years, recognizing the local, regional, and global importance of Mispillion Harbor to migrating shorebirds, The Conservation Fund (TCF), Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC), and Delaware Ornithological Society (DOS) worked tirelessly and successfully to permanently protect lands and habitat at Mispillion Harbor. However, a few remaining unprotected parcels and associated activities there disrupted the contiguity and cohesiveness of bird habitat that conservation partners envisioned.

Knowing the value and expertise DWL brings to land acquisition projects, Bill Stewart first solicited DWL's assistance with this project and what has since become the "Mispillion Harbor Shorebird Habitat Protection Project". Bill was a DWL supporter and volunteer with a relentless passion for birds. He was a founder of the DOS Bird-a-thon (which supports land acquisition projects that benefit bird habitat); a coach; a salesman; a father, grandfather, partner, and friend; a whitewater canoeist; a long-time surfer; and great partner and friend to DWL (and MANY other conservation organizations). Bill knew that DWL could assist with securing future ownership of the inholdings at Mispillion Harbor and raising the remaining funds needed for the project. Because of Bill, DWL joined with TCF, DOS, and the State of Delaware to form a partnership that ultimately yielded the successful acquisition of a few parcels of land that are small but disproportionately important for local, regional, and global bird habitat!

Though Bill passed away two years ago, DWL joins TCF, DNREC, and DOS in commemorating Bill's passion for birding with this project. It is with great pride that DWL celebrates this acquisition, the partnership that yielded this success, and the fulfillment of our promise to Bill to make the Missing Piece project whole.



"Non-typical nerd birder" Bill Stewart



# 3

## easy ways to contribute

- 1/ Monetary Donation:** In addition to accepting cash donations and Donor Advised Funds, DWL accepts the transfer of marketable securities [Mutual Funds, Stocks, Bonds, and Exchange Traded Funds (ETFs)]. These types of donations may qualify for a tax deduction.
- 2/ Planned Giving:** Did you know you can name DWL as a beneficiary of your life insurance policy or include us in your will? It can be as easy as a phone call to your insurance carrier or attorney.
- 3/ Real Estate:** DWL loves landscapes...so we are always pleased to accept donations of land! With permission from donors, we also accept donations of boats, buildings, and other assets, that can be sold and then use the proceeds to further DWL's conservation mission.

*We encourage you to contact your financial advisor, estate attorney, or tax consultant to discuss how these transactions can benefit you. DWL also has staff and advisors available to help you and answer questions. For more information, contact Kate Hackett, DWL Executive Director, at 302-378-2736 or [khackett@dewildlands.org](mailto:khackett@dewildlands.org).*





## RESTORATION

## When it comes to keeping Delaware wild, it's good to have Allies

With age comes wisdom...and the ability to recognize a good thing when we see it! This year, DWL celebrates our 60th anniversary and our successes are directly related to six decades of keen observations, adaptive management, intellectual curiosity, and initiative. We are always striving to build on our experience and expand the skills and science needed to better manage and restore the 21,800 acres we now own across the Delmarva Peninsula. To this end, we sometimes partner with other organizations when both organizations can benefit from our shared experience and expertise. (As one example, see the "DWL's Motus Tower Measures Up" article in this newsletter!)



Botanical survey training is underway with Wild Earth Allies' botanist, Dr. Steven Brewer, DWL staff, and DWL's Master Naturalist candidates.

When we were first introduced to Wild Earth Allies, immediately their dedication to conserving imperiled wildlife, protecting threatened and critical habitat, and fostering an environment of cooperation to accelerate conservation success impressed us! Their signature approach to protecting the natural world prioritizes collaboration with local organizations and individuals and integrates economic and environmental solutions, and parallels much of what we seek to accomplish. Though Wild Earth Allies' (WEA) conservation work occurs abroad, from Africa to Asia to Central America, as we traded stories and explored ideas, we quickly envisioned opportunities to work together. We are honored to have underway a partnership with

WEA that is accelerating restoration of DWL's Great Cypress Swamp and expanding their impactful work and methodologies stateside and, in particular, to the small wonder that is Delaware.

**The WEA-DWL partnership has many facets and is already yielding productive results that include:**

- *Discovering more than 70 new species at the Great Cypress Swamp including new species records for the Great Cypress Swamp and the Delmarva Peninsula;*
- *Expanding DWL's botanical knowledge and plant inventory of the Great Cypress Swamp by working alongside international WEA botanist Dr. Steven Brewer;*
- *Increasing our collective understanding of the Great Cypress Swamp ecosystem and developing new potential targets for restoration and preservation working with WEA Conservation Director Adam Henson;*
- *Restoring critical Bald cypress and Atlantic white-cedar forests by planting 13,000 trees funded with the help of new partnerships developed by WEA Executive Director Katie Frohardt; and*
- *Comprehensively and systematically monitoring plantings and biodiversity to evaluate and improve current restoration methodologies and ensure more efficient and successful restoration work into the future.*

Together, DWL and WEA recognize and are learning even more about the local, regional, and even global importance of the Great Cypress Swamp and we are pleased to join forces to accelerate restoration of this vital ecosystem and advance and improve the longevity and resiliency of this Bald cypress/ Atlantic white-cedar forest restoration project.



This Spoonleaf sundew at the Great Cypress Swamp thrives in DWL's 80-acre wetlands restoration site. (Photograph by Dr. Steven Brewer).



# Out and About on DWL's Properties



Belted Kingfisher



Marbled Salamander



Green Tree Frog



Cardinal on a Wood Duck Box



Terrapin



Blue Heron on a Wood Duck Box



Covey of Bobwhite Quail



Sanderlings on Sabellaria Reef



Ringnecked Ducks

# A snapshot from 60 years of DWL's conservation work



DWL's first acquisition, Trussum Pond, is pictured in this 1970s photograph. DWL eventually conveyed this property to the State of Delaware as an addition to Trap Pond State Park so that visitors, canoeists, birders, and outdoor enthusiasts could marvel at the breath-taking beauty and bounty of this ecological treasure.





## RESEARCH/EDUCATION

# DWL's Motus Tower Measures Up

BY: JEN MITCHELL

One hour, forty-two minutes, and fourteen seconds. That's how long Rusty blackbird #22979 stopped at Delaware Wild Lands' Great Cypress Swamp (GCS) on December 26, 2020. The same blackbird returned on January 2nd, 9th, and 14th. But that wasn't enough for #22979, as on January 22nd, it stayed at the GCS for more than thirty-three hours.

For conservationists and birders alike, this is welcome news as Rusty blackbirds are one of the most rapidly declining species in North America. Studies estimate the population has dropped by 86-99% over the last forty years, and scientists don't know why.

The whereabouts of Rusty blackbird #22979 are known only because of a partnership between Delaware Wild Lands (DWL), Williston Conservation Trust, and the Northeast Motus Project, who erected a Motus tower at the GCS in late 2019. This tower receives signals from nano tags (lightweight radio transmitters) fitted onto songbirds, bats, owls and even insects like the Monarch butterfly.

"Identifying wintering and stopover habitat for Rusty blackbirds is amazing," said Alison Fetterman, Williston Conservation Trust Northeast Motus Project Manager. "The fact it's wintering right there is really important." To date, the DWL tower has detected three different Rusty blackbirds, a Semipalmated plover, Black-poll warbler, Savannah sparrow, Tree swallow, Yellow-rumped warbler, White-throated sparrow, Swainson's warbler, an American Woodcock, and more.

**DWL's Motus tower has four antennas and detects signal bursts within a fifteen-kilometer radius. The flat topography, vast habitat, and the great opportunities for partnership make the GCS an ideal location for a tower.**

With towers similar to the one at Great Cypress Swamp placed all over the world, The Motus (Latin for movement) Wildlife Tracking System tracks the movements of tagged wildlife. "With Motus we're able to study inter-continental movements of a single small animal, which we previously couldn't," said Avian Motus Research Coordinator, Michelle Eschelman. "This information is valuable for tracking specific migration patterns and durations." Motus towers log tag detections immediately. Depending on the tower (DWL's tower automatically uploads the data through a cell signal) tag information may be available on Motus.org within a matter of days, accessible to both the researchers and the public alike.

Accessibility is one of the main goals of the Motus Program. Motus.org is a treasure trove of information. Clicking on a tower brings up the tag detections. From the tags you can find the project name, the date and location of deployment, and, by clicking on the map option, you can see the bird's route, flight speed, and stopover time. The ultimate in bird reality show!



Data collected from this Motus tower at DWL's Roman Fisher Farm show migratory birds utilizing habitat in the Great Cypress Swamp as well as Belize and northern South America.



This map depicts the migration of one Semi-palmated sandpiper (ID# 27763) from Brazil to the Virginia Coastal Reserve to DWL's Great Cypress Swamp to the Jersey Shore and beyond! (<https://motus.org/data/track?tagDeploymentId=27763>)



## PARTNERSHIPS

# New Castle Conservation District Gives DWL a Boost at Betts

Many DWL farm roads were built fifty or more years ago. At the time, farm equipment was smaller and the farm access lanes were narrower, turns were tighter, and ditches paralleled the lanes to move water away from fields and help filter water flowing from the farm fields. Today, farm equipment is larger, wider, and heavier, and many of the roadside ditches have filled in or eroded away. Additionally, the integrity of many of these roads has started to deteriorate, contributing to poor water management that ultimately contributes to further road degradation and more sedimentation.

One cold winter day, a corrugated pipe under a farm access lane at DWL's Betts Farm collapsed causing damage to the farm lane, sedimentation in the watercourse, and concerns about the ability of our farmers to access their fields. We recognized this road failure also presented an opportunity to repair the road to support modern day farm equipment, but it would likely come with a steep price-tag.

Knowing New Castle Conservation District could provide important insights into design and water management, we solicited their engineering input and construction recommendations for the road widening, turn reconstruction, field access, water management, and improvements to associated stormwater management. New Castle Conservation District delivered on all aspects through a cost-shared project agreement with DWL! We are grateful for this support from the District and a big thank you to Jeff Bartsch Trucking & Excavating Inc. for getting the job done!



Before New Castle Conservation District's assistance, note the erosion on the left side of the road.



This new road is wider, better stabilized, improves water management and filtration, and provides better ingress/egress for large farm equipment. Great construction by Jeff Bartsch Trucking & Excavating Inc.!

### NATIVE PLANT PROFILE

## Southern Twayblade

(*Listeria australis*)



This spring, Dr. Steven Brewer (of Wild Earth Allies) conducted his first botanical survey at DWL's Great Cypress Swamp. (Once his work is complete, it will be the first update to DWL's botanic inventory of the Swamp since the 1990s!) For much of Steven's stay, DWL's Ron Haas guided him to strategic locations throughout the Swamp. At one point, Steven stopped abruptly as he peered in the direction of an often-overlooked perennial plant in the Orchid family called Southern Twayblade, which is not uncommon in the Great Cypress Swamp. Southern Twayblade is easily overlooked because of its low growth and purplish stem. Its flowers are maroon in color, and have a bifurcated lower lip, resulting in two distinctive tails trailing from each flower. Interestingly, these small flowers are actually pollinated by mosquitos! Known for their appetite for blood, all mosquitos actually feed on nectar as their primary food source, making them important pollinators for wetland plants like Southern Twayblade.





## PARTNERSHIPS

# Cantwell's Tavern Continues Commitment to Conservation

This year DWL's Annual Wild Game Dinner Revamp may not have looked familiar to those past, but that didn't deter participation. Some might even say this year's fundraiser was even wilder! Thanks to Executive Chef Zane Dippold and his talented coworkers at Cantwell's Tavern, supporters were able to enjoy a wild game sampler while chatting with DWL staff during a virtual happy hour. Highlights of the evening included great conversation about DWL's major protection and restoration projects for 2021, an update on DWL's Wood Duck Conservation Initiative, and finally getting to "see" those who make all of our work possible – our partners, donors, and volunteers! The star of the show? A charcuterie board of venison prosciutto and duck confit paired with local honey, gourmet cheeses, duck fat crostini, and cabernet sauvignon that cured everyone's wild game cravings and left everyone with an optimistic outlook for conservation in DE in 2021!

A special thanks to Cantwell's Tavern, Brown Advisory, Pratt Insurance, and Wilmington Wine Company for their sponsorship; as well as our local hunters, Greg Pettinaro, Ron Haas, Rob Piascinski, and Porter Schutt for their wild game donations.



## DWL Wish List

Looking for a unique way to support DWL's conservation and restoration efforts, or our stewardship and community outreach work? Check out our wish list:

- **Loppers**
- **Work gloves**
- **Plastic storage totes**
- **Binoculars**
- **Adult life vests**
- **64GB and 16MB SD cards**
- **5/8" rebar, 10' lengths**
- **Galvanized or stainless wood screws**
- **Drill bits**
- **Case of WD-40**
- **Flagging tape, various colors**
- **4ft wooden stakes**
- **Batteries - AAA, AA and D**
- **Headlamps**
- **Wood duck boxes**
- **Heavy duty trash bags**
- **Chest and hip waders**
- **Scrap wood, tin and carpet**
- **Cooler, 16-quart**
- **4 pool noodles**
- **Leaf blower**
- **Garden hose**
- **Wheelbarrow, with 2 wheels**

# DWL by the Numbers



**4,250 lbs.**  
Rebar Used for the Taylors  
Bridge Tree Planting



**10** Bob White  
Quail Coveys heard  
at Taylors Bridge







## Kim Staska, Office Manager

Meet Kim Staska, DWL's new Office Manager! With over 25 years of experience as an executive assistant and project manager, Kim is well versed in streamlining workflows, organizing an office, and seeing projects through to the end. A Georgia transplant from an Atlanta suburb, Kim moved to Delaware to enjoy a less hectic lifestyle. Kim worked as an assistant in the finance industry and private sector. She has a degree in History and Political Science. Outside of work, Kim is a master mom and grandmother who loves to spend time with family, friends, and pets.



## Brigham Whitman New Castle County Conservation Programs Manager

Brigham has a life-long passion for wildlife and the natural environment and comes to us from Connecticut. He earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from Clark University where he studied fire ecology and three-spine stickleback in Alaska. He later earned a Master of Science degree from the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry where he studied white-tailed deer mortality. Recently, Brigham worked in international wildlife conservation at the Zoological Society of Milwaukee to protect wildlife and support park guards in the Congolese rainforest.



## Al Rizzo Habitat Restoration Specialist

DWL also welcomes aboard the expertise and experience of Al Rizzo. Al is a West Virginia University alum with 30 years of restoration experience, a certified professional soil scientist, and wildlife biologist. Al started his career reclaiming surface mines in West Virginia, had his own consulting firm for 5 years, and then worked for United States Fish and Wildlife Service for 28 years finishing his service as project leader for the coastal Delaware National Wildlife Refuge Complex. Al adds, "I was born and raised in Wilmington, am a Henry C Conrad High School alum, and consider myself to be an endangered species... a native Delawarean!"



**We Are Migrating . . .**

**Effective October 1, 2021, our new nest will be:**  
**315 Taylors Bridge Road, Townsend, DE 19734**

Our office phone number & mailing address will remain the same.  
 302-378-2736 • PO Box 505, Odessa, DE 19730

*Delaware Wild Lands, Inc.*  
**315 Taylors Bridge Road,  
 Townsend, DE 19734**

In celebration of DWL's 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year, we are increasing our land protection and restoration projects AND we are moving our office to the Roberts Farm located on our 5,250-acre Taylors Bridge Land Complex.

Come see us and witness the iconic beauty of Delaware from the windows of our new office.

Hope to see you soon!




**DELAWARE WILD LANDS**

PO Box 505

Odessa, DE 19730-0505



**DELAWARE WILD LANDS**

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