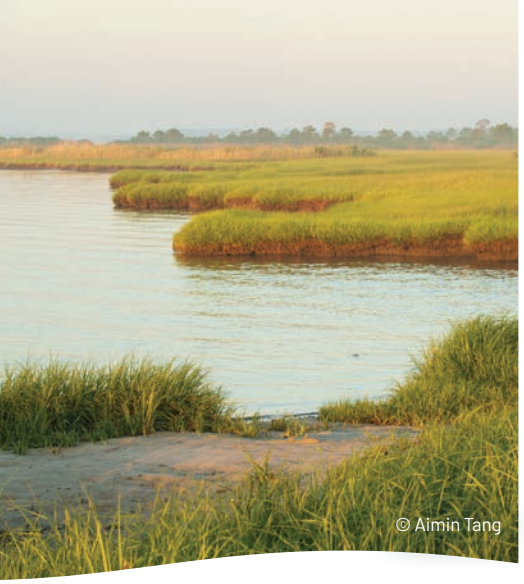


The Nature Conservancy

Delaware

2026 Impact Report


© Aimin Tang


©Melisa Soysal/TNC

Dear Friends, Partners and Supporters,

This year marks a special milestone for The Nature Conservancy in the United States: 75 years of protecting the lands and waters that sustain us all. This diamond anniversary gives us both perspective on how far we've come, and how much work there is still left to do.

This past year, we continued to restore forests and habitats through prescribed fire on TNC and partner lands, advanced investments that help farmers keep our rivers and oceans healthier, and helped drive one of Delaware's most significant conservation victories in years: the passage of the Wetlands Stewardship Act. TNC played an instrumental role in advancing the legislation, working with policymakers and partners to secure long-overdue protections for freshwater wetlands across the First State.

With 2030 approaching, the years ahead are critical. Our newly completed Roadmap to 2030 charts a clear course of action for the work ahead, focusing our efforts where they can have the greatest impact and turn TNC's ambitious goals into lasting results for Delaware's open spaces, waters, communities and beautiful heritage.

In partnership with landowners, agencies, conservation organizations and supporters like you, we're demonstrating that healthy lands, clean water and resilient communities go hand in hand. **Thank you for being part of this journey.**

As we look ahead, we are pleased to welcome Rick Speizman as our new Board Chair and three new trustees. Together, their leadership and partnership will help guide the next chapter of our work.

As you read the stories in these pages, we hope you'll see your impact in what we've witnessed throughout the year: When we invest in nature, nature delivers—for wildlife, for communities and for our shared future.

With gratitude,



Lori Brennan
Executive Director



Rick Speizman
Board Chair

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• Tim Thiess, Director of Finance & Operations
• Kritika Langhauser, Director of Marketing & Communications

Our 2030 Goals

The Nature Conservancy Pennsylvania & Delaware	TNC GLOBAL GOALS	PENNSYLVANIA & DELAWARE GOALS	PENNSYLVANIA & DELAWARE CONSERVATION STRATEGY
HEALTHY LANDS	**1.6 billion** acres of land conserved	**40,000** acres of land protected **250,000** acres of land with improved management	Advancing land protection projects and supporting land trust partners to secure 200 miles of critical climate corridors. Helping incorporate climate science into forest management and build capacity for controlled burning.
HEALTHY OCEANS	**10 billion** acres of ocean conserved	**500** acres of ocean protected **500,000** acres of ocean with improved management	Accelerating land protection and restoration through programs that support coastal ecosystem migration.
HEALTHY LAKES, WETLANDS	**74 million** acres of lakes and wetlands conserved	**3,000** acres of lakes and wetlands with improved management	Across the Chesapeake Bay watershed we are restoring wetlands and mobilizing farm advisors to increase the adoption of enhanced nutrient management practices.
HEALTHY RIVERS	**620,000** miles of rivers conserved	**3,500** miles of rivers with improved management	
CLIMATE MITIGATION	**3 billion** metric tons of carbon emissions mitigated or stored per year	**100 million** metric tons of carbon emissions mitigated or stored per year	Lobbying for the passage of state climate and clean energy policies and defending federal climate policies and mitigation investments.
CLIMATE ADAPTATION	**100 million** people benefitting	**2 million** people benefiting	Scaling and accelerating investments in nature-based solutions and demonstrating their ability to mitigate climate change impacts on human health.

We will ensure 50% of all croplands are using soil health and enhanced nutrient management practices.



We will continue to support Pennsylvania's emission reductions on track towards a target of 88 million metric tons of CO2 equivalent per year.





We will protect 40,000 acres of land and ensure 250,000 acres within Appalachian Focal Landscapes are under improved management.



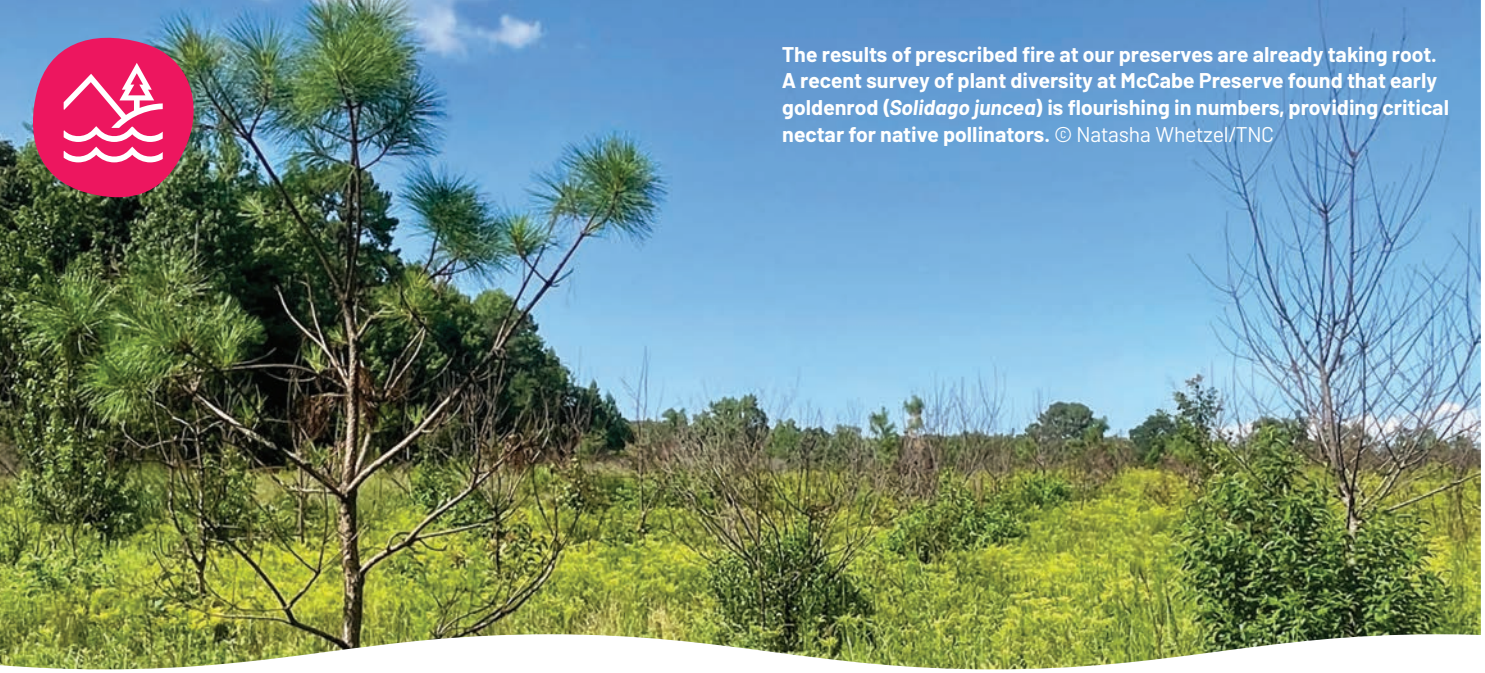
We will scale nature-based solutions in the Philadelphia region and beyond to reduce flooding and extreme heat for 500,000 people, contributing to our 2 million people overall goal.

We will continue to support partners in protecting 500 acres of coastal lands along the Delaware Bayshore.



COVER: © C Louis Creations;
Lori Brennan headshot © Sammy Jo Photography
Rick Speizman headshot © Courtesy of Rick Speizman

LEARN MORE
Places we protect in Delaware



The results of prescribed fire at our preserves are already taking root. A recent survey of plant diversity at McCabe Preserve found that early goldenrod (*Solidago juncea*) is flourishing in numbers, providing critical nectar for native pollinators. © Natasha Whetzel/TNC



TNC is helping address flooding in the town of Little Creek through green stormwater infrastructure and a planned living shoreline. © Glenn Gauvry

Protect Ocean, Land and Freshwater

Preparing Bayshore Communities for a Changing Coast

Along the Delaware Bayshore, TNC is helping coastal communities and natural habitats adapt to climate change. As the nation's lowest-lying state, Delaware is especially vulnerable to sea level rise, making this work essential to the future of its people, wildlife and coastal heritage. In fact, just two feet of sea level rise could impact 46%—roughly 68,000 acres—of protected lands in the state.

In Kent County, TNC acquired a 14-acre property and transferred it to the town of Little Creek, creating space for a new green stormwater management system designed to reduce flooding along Route 9 and Port Mahon Road. Funded by the Department of Defense's Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) Program, the project is part of a broader partnership with the University of Delaware that includes a planned living shoreline by Port Mahon Road—a nature-based solution that uses natural materials to stabilize eroded shorelines, protect habitat and help communities adapt to rising seas.

While Delaware's Bayshore is an important learning ground for coastal resilience, the opportunity for impact extends beyond the First State. TNC is working with colleagues across North America to share expertise, learn from each other and scale strategies that help tidal marshes adapt to sea level rise. This spring, TNC regional strategy leads joined Pennsylvania/Delaware leadership in southern Delaware to observe marsh migration firsthand at our Milford Neck Preserve and discuss the critical actions needed to ensure that Delaware's coastal habitats are able to adapt to climate change. This work is helping to scale solutions and shape a healthier Atlantic Coast.

LEARN MORE

Delaware's Coastal Resilience Roadmap

When Fire Leads the Way: Restoring Nature With Prescribed Burns

Fire is a natural part of healthy forests and grasslands. By using prescribed fire, TNC restores wildlife habitat, improves forest health and reduces the risk of catastrophic wildfires.

TNC's Delmarva Seasonal Burn Crew works at landscape scale across both Delaware and eastern Maryland to provide essential capacity for prescribed fire implementation on TNC preserves and partner lands. In 2026, the crew completed 17 burns across 816 acres on TNC and partner lands, including 91 acres on Delaware preserves. And nature is responding. At Ponders Tract, the rare slender rose gentian population increased from five plants to 41 in just one year, while additional native wildflowers began to bloom this summer at McCabe Preserve.

Igniting the Next Generation of Fire Leadership

This spring, we welcomed Myrilla Hartkopf from The Nature Conservancy in New Hampshire for a hands-on mentorship experience through TNC's Women in Fire Employee Resource Group. Working alongside Delaware Stewardship and Fire Manager Natasha Whetzel, she gained valuable field experience while advancing toward her Firefighter Type 1 (Squad Boss) certification.

Programs like this help more women build careers in prescribed fire while strengthening the future of conservation. We're proud to support the next generation of leaders who will restore and care for our forests and grasslands.

LEFT: This spring, TNC regional strategy leads joined Pennsylvania/Delaware leadership in southern Delaware to observe marsh migration firsthand at our Milford Neck Preserve and share strategies for helping tidal marshes adapt to sea level rise and strengthen coastal resilience. This work is helping to scale solutions and shape a healthier Atlantic Coast. © Will Helt/TNC

CENTER: Bennett's Trail begins near the entrance of McCabe Preserve and follows a 0.63-mile Universal Access route designed to accommodate visitors of all abilities. © Sarah Walter/Penn Trails

Helping Rare Species Thrive

At Middleford North Preserve, a state biologist recently spotted an extremely rare hoverfly (*Microdon fuscipennis*) —one of the first recorded global sightings of this short-horned ant fly in nearly 30 years. Through land management and stewardship efforts such as tree thinnings, invasives removal and maintaining open sandy habitat, we are restoring the conditions for habitats that these rare native species rely on.

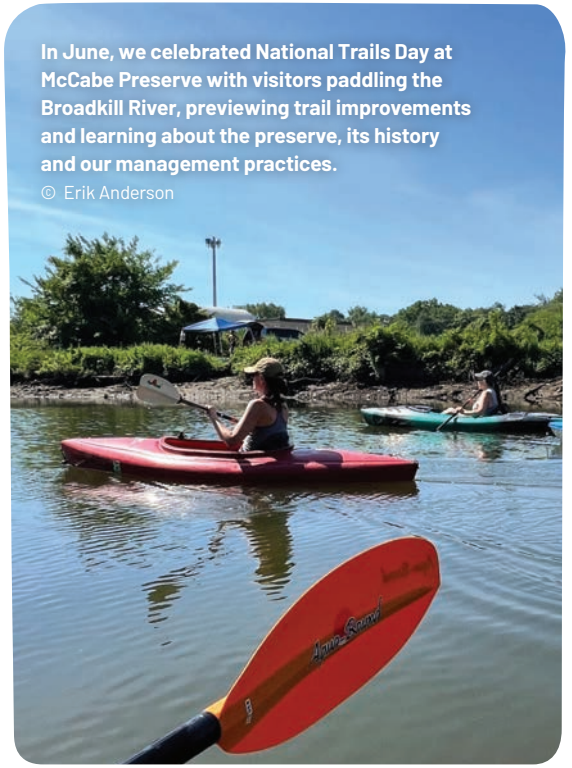
LEARN MORE Explore more rare and endangered species making a comeback in Delaware thanks to conservation efforts



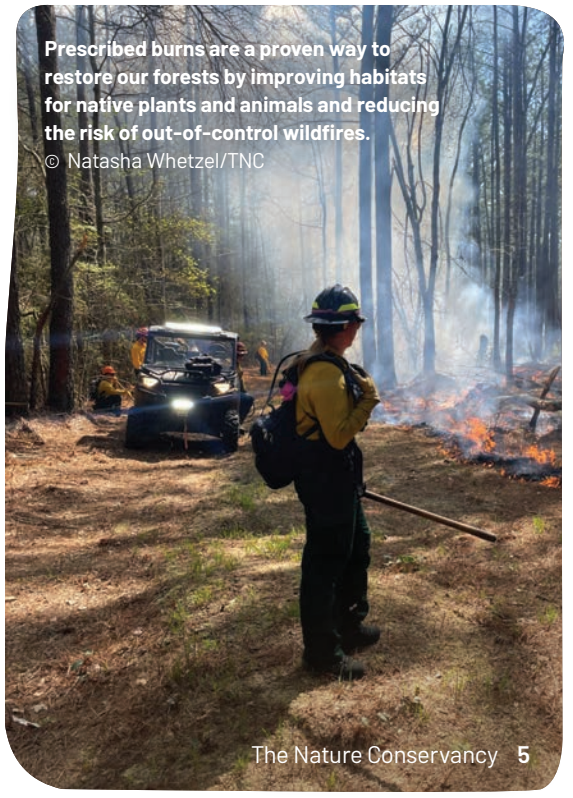
Opening the Outdoors at McCabe Preserve

Located in the historic town of Milton in Sussex County, Edward H. McCabe Preserve showcases a diverse range of habitats, from tidal marshes to upland forests and Atlantic white cedar swamps. With hiking trails, a public boat dock and frequent wildlife sightings, this preserve offers visitors countless ways to experience nature.

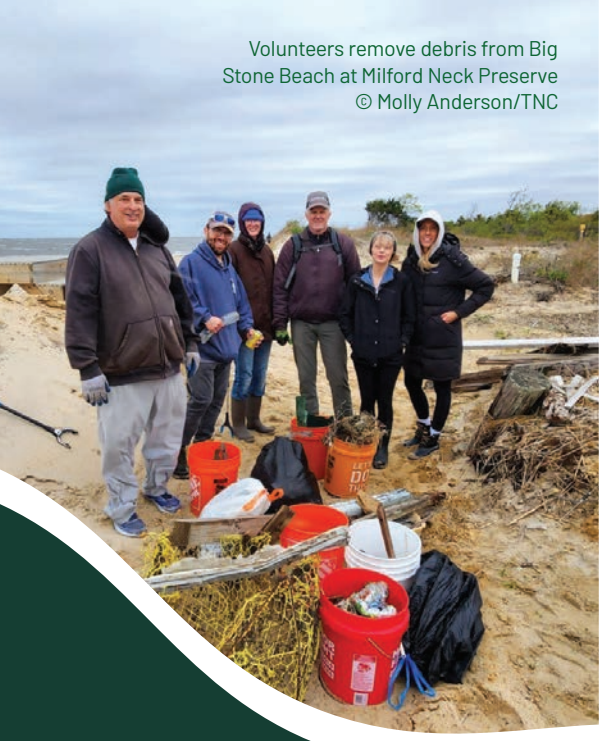
Completed this summer, visitors can enjoy the newly improved Bennett's Trail, now a 0.63-mile out-and-back Universal Access Trail surrounded by beautiful woodland habitat. We're grateful to Penn Trails, a leader in sustainable design, for helping to design a trail that expands opportunities for everyone to connect with nature.



In June, we celebrated National Trails Day at McCabe Preserve with visitors paddling the Broadkill River, previewing trail improvements and learning about the preserve, its history and our management practices.
© Erik Anderson



Prescribed burns are a proven way to restore our forests by improving habitats for native plants and animals and reducing the risk of out-of-control wildfires.
© Natasha Whetzel/TNC

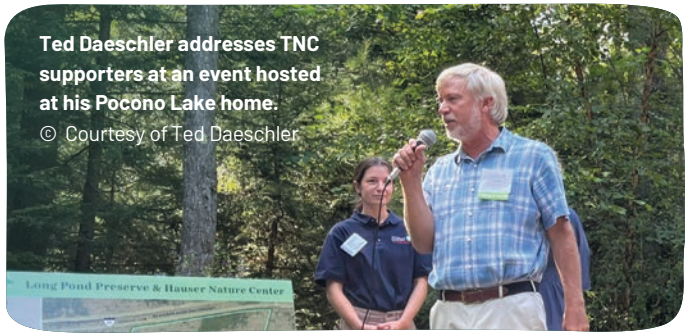


Volunteers remove debris from Big Stone Beach at Milford Neck Preserve
© Molly Anderson/TNC

Volunteers in Action: Working Together

Our volunteers and corporate partners play an important role in caring for our preserves. We're grateful for their time, energy and commitment to help restore and protect Delaware's natural lands and waters. This year, volunteers contributed **more than 400 hours**, including:

- **Restoring forests at Milford Neck Preserve** during Chesapeake Utilities' annual employee workday
- **Protecting Delaware's coastline** by removing debris from Big Stone Beach on Earth Day at Milford Neck Preserve
- **Advancing restoration at Middleford North Preserve** during Dogfish Head's annual Benevolence Day



Ted Daeschler addresses TNC supporters at an event hosted at his Pocono Lake home.
© Courtesy of Ted Daeschler

In Service of Nature: Reflections on a Decade of Leadership and Impact

When **Carol Collier** and **Ted Daeschler** joined The Nature Conservancy's Pennsylvania/Delaware Board more than a decade ago, each brought a lifelong appreciation for the natural world. Carol arrived with decades of experience in environmental policy and regulation. Ted, a geologist and paleontologist, had spent a career thinking about Earth's history through the lens of deep time. What neither expected was just how much they would learn.

"I've gained a deeper understanding of how strategies grounded in science can drive meaningful impact for nature and the world around us." – Carol Collier

For both, a love of nature began long before they ever joined the Board. Childhoods spent exploring marshes and forests, as well as mentors who nurtured their curiosity – sparked a lifelong commitment to conservation. Ted still remembers when members of his family helped raise funds to protect Adams Swamp near TNC's Long Pond Preserve decades ago, a place he continues to enjoy today. Carol traces her passion for environmental science back to the first Earth Day, when a growing awareness of environmental challenges inspired a change in college major and ultimately her life's work.

Over the years, both gained a deeper appreciation for the scale of TNC's work – from restoring wetlands to collaborating with partners on land protection and biodiversity challenges. Field visits to Chesapeake Bay restoration projects, conversations with scientists and opportunities to connect directly with staff reinforced an idea both hold true: Meaningful conservation happens through collaboration.

That collaborative approach is one of the qualities they admire most about The Nature Conservancy. Rather than choosing between conservation and economic prosperity, they saw an organization committed to advancing both. Whether helping farmers adopt practices that improve water quality, protecting migration corridors along the Kittatinny Ridge or planning for the future of coastal marshes as sea levels rise, TNC relies on sound science, practical solutions and partnerships to create lasting impact.

For Ted, whose career centered on understanding Earth's long history, that long-term perspective shapes how he views conservation itself. "The Earth has always changed," he explained. "What concerns us today is the speed of change. Conservation is about giving nature the opportunity to adapt and ensuring the decisions we make today continue to matter hundreds or even thousands of years from now."

Serving as trustees also reinforced the power of philanthropy. Ted recalled speaking at Legacy Club events and sharing why he had chosen to include TNC in his own legacy plans. Knowing those conversations inspired others to invest in conservation became one of the most meaningful moments of Ted's Board service.

We are so grateful to Ted and Carol for their commitment to conservation and the legacy they helped build will continue for generations to come.





© Hunter Nichols

Through a gift in your estate plans, you can help ensure that the conservation impact you've made possible today continues well into the future.

By joining the One Future Legacy Match, you'll activate funds for immediate use toward our global priorities of tackling climate change; protecting ocean, land and fresh water; and providing food and water sustainably.

Simply share the estimated amount of your legacy gift or establish a life income gift and 20% of its value will be matched to help us address these challenges today.

To learn more about how you can ensure the work you care about continues for the next generation, please email **PADEFundraisingTeam@tnc.org**.

LEARN MORE

Create Your Conservation Legacy

LEFT: At TNC's Volunteer Leadership Summit, Carol Collier proudly recognizes the PA/DE Board's achievement of 50% or greater participation in the Legacy Club © Courtesy of Carol Collier



© Courtesy of Ray Henrick

"I believe in starting young and igniting that spark for the next generation. Once you develop a connection to nature, it stays with you for life."

DONOR SPOTLIGHT

Ray Henrick

Rooted in Nature, Growing a Legacy

For more than five decades, Ray Henrick has been a steadfast supporter of The Nature Conservancy, first joining TNC in 1973 and continuing to invest in conservation through both his philanthropy and personal actions. Today, as a valued Legacy Club member, his commitment to protecting the natural world can be seen not only through his support of TNC, but also in the landscape he has carefully cultivated around his Delaware home.

A botanist, avid birder and lifelong conservationist, Ray has transformed his property from a simple lawn into a thriving haven for wildlife. Native plants, colorful gardens and fruit orchards now provide food and habitat for birds, pollinators and countless other species. He is actively engaged with neighbors, local farmers and his church, often sharing fruit from his orchards with others. His love of nature began in childhood, spending summers on his grandparents' farm in Virginia, where long days outdoors fostered a deep appreciation for the natural world that would shape the rest of his life.

Ray's passion for conservation extends to TNC's Delaware preserves, where he participates in tree-planting activities, helping restore habitat and strengthen landscapes that benefit both wildlife and communities. Whether he is tending native plants, sharing his knowledge with fellow nature enthusiasts or creating habitat for birds and pollinators to thrive, Ray leads by example.

Ray sees his planned gift as an opportunity to give back to the natural places that have enriched his life and inspire others to do the same. Through decades of dedication, stewardship and generosity, he has helped create a healthier future for both people and nature, leaving an enduring impact that will continue to grow for years to come.



© Cameron Davidson



Provide Food and Water Sustainably

The Chesapeake Bay is North America's largest estuary and a major economic engine. As the Bay's watershed runs down the western side of Delaware, protecting this system requires improving how land and water are managed. In Delaware, TNC is working to help farmers adopt innovative conservation practices and influence policy to accelerate restoration at a larger scale.

From Farm Fields to a Healthier Chesapeake Bay

Agriculture is Delaware's number one industry, and it's also one of the greatest opportunities for improving water quality across the Chesapeake Bay. This year, TNC and partners launched **PlantMap3D**, a USDA-supported initiative that uses cover crop-scanning cameras and data analysis to help farmers in Delaware, Pennsylvania and Maryland optimize fertilizer use. By working through trusted agribusiness advisors, farmers can reduce nitrogen losses while improving soil health, protecting waterways and lowering input costs.

LEARN MORE

Improving soil and water quality while boosting farmers' bottom lines in the Chesapeake Bay

With more intense rain events putting communities across the First State at greater risk of flooding, it's critical that farmers have the right tools to prepare and respond. This summer, U.S. Senator Lisa Blunt Rochester introduced the bipartisan Farmers Lifeline Options for Overcoming Disasters Act, or the FLOOD Act, which would help farmers place floodplain easements on their land before disaster strikes. The FLOOD Act is a commonsense and cost-effective tool that supports the future of Delaware's working lands and resilience of our rural communities.

LEARN MORE

The FLOOD Act: Supporting local agriculture before and after disaster strikes

LEFT: The use of cover crops is a regenerative agriculture tool. These plants release nitrogen – essential to growing food – into the soil when they discompose, which reduces the total amount of fertilizer that farmers need to apply to their fields. Less fertilizer means less runoff into local waterways, and a healthier Chesapeake Bay watershed. © John Hinkson/TNC

Listening, Learning and Scaling What Works

This year, TNC applied social science methods to better understand how landowners and land managers make decisions, what challenges they face and what motivates them to adopt conservation practices. These insights have helped TNC and our partners improve outreach, design more effective conservation incentives and accelerate restoration across the watershed

LEARN MORE

How social science drives our work in the Bay

Fishing for Conservation: A Day on the Bay

This spring, TNC brought together donors, trustees, staff and partners for a day on the Bay guided by renowned Chesapeake Bay photographer and fisherman Jay Fleming and TNC's Chesapeake Bay Program Director, Amy Jacobs. Participants experienced the life of a waterman for a day while learning about the ecological and economic impacts of invasive blue catfish, which were introduced to the Chesapeake Basin in the 1970s. We ended the day with a meal featuring locally harvested blue catfish, demonstrating how market-based solutions can help address environmental challenges while supporting local communities.

"Experiencing this work firsthand made the connection between conservation science, local ecosystems and potential sourcing solutions more tangible." —Aramark

We're especially grateful to Dogfish Head Craft Brewery, Aramark and Aldus Brewing Company for joining us and for their continued commitment to protecting the Chesapeake Bay.

LEARN MORE

The Chesapeake Bay: TNC's Newest Global Foodscape



ABOVE, from left: Sophia Smecker, TNC trustee, and Hamzah Abu-Ragheb, Aramark; BELOW, from left: Jay Fleming, photographer and fisherman, and Emilia Hill, Aramark, enjoy a day of fishing and conservation on the Bay. © Melisa Soysal/TNC



DONOR SPOTLIGHT
ARAMARK

As a leader in food services and facilities, Aramark sees firsthand how closely food, communities, supply chains and the environment are connected. It's no surprise that sustainability is core to Aramark's business—embedded in how they operate, care for their employees and deliver value to communities around the world. Aramark's partnership with TNC reflects a shared belief that environmental stewardship, community wellbeing and resilient food systems are deeply connected.

Through support of Chesapeake Bay conservation and engagement with TNC's conservation teams, Aramark is helping advance practical solutions that benefit both people and nature. The partnership brings together conservation science, local action and business expertise, creating opportunities to strengthen ecosystems while supporting the communities and economies that depend on them.

As organizations with a shared commitment to creating lasting impact, TNC and Aramark are demonstrating how partnerships can translate sustainability goals into meaningful progress. Together, we are helping to build a future where people and nature thrive together. Their partnership shows what's possible when shared values are matched by collaboration, innovation and sustained action for people and nature.

"At Aramark, we believe hospitality done right can help improve lives and strengthen our world. Partnerships with organizations like The Nature Conservancy help us connect our sustainability commitments to local conservation action, supporting healthier ecosystems, more resilient communities, and a stronger future for people and the planet."

—Natily Santos, VP, Global Responsible Sourcing, Aramark Supply Chain & GPO



The passage of the Wetlands Stewardship Act was a historic milestone that will protect critical non-tidal wetlands in the First State. This Atlantic white cedar swamp is a freshwater wetland located within TNC's Middleford North Preserve in Sussex County.
© John Hinkson/TNC



© The Nature Conservancy

Tackle Climate Change

In Dover, TNC advances policies that protect Delaware's natural resources and strengthen communities. Working across all levels of government, we leverage policy to help conserve the forests, farms, wetlands and other treasured landscapes that support the First State's economy, quality of life and natural heritage.

2026 Legislative Successes

The 2026 General Assembly session concluded on June 30, bringing with it several investments that safeguard the lands, waters and wild places that define Delaware's communities for the benefit of future generations.

KEY WINS INCLUDE:

- **$20 million** for the **Delaware Open Space and Farmland Preservation Programs** that will provide places for people to connect with nature, support wildlife habitat, keep agriculture viable and maintain the rural character integral to Delaware's identity
- The **passage of landmark freshwater wetlands legislation** that creates state protections for freshwater wetlands that lost federal safeguards in recent years

As nature's superheroes, freshwater wetlands reduce flooding by storing stormwater, filter pollutants before they reach rivers and bays, replenish groundwater supplies, provide habitat for wildlife and make communities more resilient to increasingly severe storms.

A Win for Freshwater Wetlands: Nature's Superheroes

After decades of starts and stops since 1988, Delaware took a major step forward in protecting non-tidal wetlands with the passage of Senate Bill 9, the Wetlands Stewardship Act. Led by State Senator Stephanie Hansen, the legislation establishes state-level protections for 75,000 acres of freshwater, non-tidal wetlands that lost federal safeguards over the decades, most recently through the 2023 U.S. Supreme Court *Sackett* ruling. It also creates a practical permitting process developed with agriculture, business and environmental leaders at the table.

Freshwater wetlands are among Delaware's most valuable assets. Protecting these natural systems is one of the smartest investments Delaware can make for both people and nature.

From left to right: DNREC Secretary Greg Patterson, Sen. Stephanie Hansen, Governor Matt Meyer (seated), Rep. Frank Cooke, Mike Riemann from the Home Builders Association of Delaware, and TNC's Delaware Director of Government Relations Emily Knearl © Joe Edelen / Delaware Senate Majority Caucus

Bolstering Climate Resiliency

Delaware is facing significant challenges from climate change, making thoughtful land use planning more important than ever. In 2024, TNC worked with State Senator Hansen and partners to champion Senate Bill 237, legislation to strengthen local government climate planning requirements. Led by the state, the new requirements will be integrated into county and municipal comprehensive planning this year, helping communities reduce climate risk, build resilience and protect Delaware's natural resources as they plan for future growth.





© The Nature Conservancy

A Day of Advocacy in Dover

Held annually at Legislative Hall, The Delaware Land Protection Coalition's Conservation Day is an opportunity for local conservation organizations to advocate for the priorities and policies vital to the health and wellbeing of people and nature in Delaware.

This year was the largest-ever gathering, with participants joining meetings with state legislators, as well as staff from the Office of Governor Meyer, and state land use planning officials to advocate for open space and conservation. Our messages were well-received, and we were encouraged by the clear commitment to safeguard Delaware's environment and quality of life.

LOOKING AHEAD: **Together for Nature**

As we look towards the future, we do so with both urgency and optimism. For the threatened red knot who depend on our beaches and healthy spawning populations of horseshoe crab, salt marsh sparrows and black rails that rely on coastal marshes resilient to sea-level rise, and the farmers and landowners whose stewardship of working lands supports cleaner water flowing to the Chesapeake Bay and Delaware Bay.

In the year ahead, we will continue advancing conservation at the scale needed to meet tomorrow's challenges. From protecting and restoring forests, to strengthening freshwater and coastal ecosystems, to helping communities and natural systems become more resilient in a changing climate, we are bringing together science, policy, partnerships to create lasting impact.

But the challenges facing people and nature are growing in scale and complexity. Your support is especially critical because it allows us to direct resources where they are needed most, respond quickly to emerging opportunities and challenges, accelerate innovative solutions, and invest in the places and communities where we can achieve the greatest impact.

Together, we can create a future with thriving lands and waters, resilient communities, and a livable climate for generations to come.

WE INVITE YOU TO BE PART OF THE JOURNEY.

The Nature Conservancy

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