

# Delaware Landowner Incentive Programs

## Benefits of Incentive Programs

Delaware is a biologically diverse state with hardwood forests, swamps and coastal marshes that support over 400 species of mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians. Despite significant strides in conservation, much of the wildlife habitat in Delaware remains isolated, degraded and unprotected as more land is converted to urban, commercial and industrial uses.

Over 80 percent of the available and/or restorable wildlife habitat in Delaware occurs on private lands. The future of Delaware's wildlife and habitat resources hinges on finding cooperative solutions with Delaware's private landowners to restore and enhance wildlife habitat on their properties. A variety of programs are now available which offer private landowners, particularly agricultural producers, technical and financial incentives to protect, enhance and restore habitats on their properties. Eligible conservation practices include the restoration and/or enhancement of wetlands, riparian forest, and grass buffers, and creation of forested areas and grasslands that support a variety of species.

The Delaware Landowner Incentive Program is designed to:

- 1) provide information to private landowners on the programs available for restoring and enhancing habitat on their property;
- 2) provide technical assistance with developing a conservation plan for each participating landowner and;
- 3) assist the landowner with enrollment in applicable conservation programs and implementation of conservation practices.



## Eligibility Requirements

Eligible lands vary per program. Select programs target agricultural producers while others are available to all landowners. Programs provide assistance for wetland restoration and enhancement, riparian forest and grass buffer establishment, upland early successional habitat enhancement, and forest restoration and/or enhancement. Listed below are possible site conditions indicating if your land would be suitable for enrollment. (Please note that this is just a sample of the practices available. For further information please contact the Division of Fish and Wildlife.)

### 1. Wetland Restoration/Enhancement:

Financial and technical assistance is available from the Division of Fish and Wildlife, Ducks Unlimited Inc., U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Division of Soil and Water Conservation, Natural Resource Conservation Service and county Conservation Districts.

- invasive and alien species encroachment, into wetland areas, specifically *Phragmites*, also known as common reed
- areas with low crop yields due to ponding or flooding
- areas that have been ditched or tiled
- degraded or farmed wetlands
- areas that flood periodically
- floodplains

### 2. Riparian Forest / Grass Buffers:

Assistance is available from the Division of Fish and Wildlife, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Natural Resource Conservation Service, Delaware Forest Service and county Conservation Districts.

- areas adjacent to ditches or streams
- highly erodible lands
- field borders

### 3. Upland Early Successional Habitat:

The Division of Fish and Wildlife, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Wild Turkey Federation, Natural Resource Conservation Service and the Conservation Districts all have programs available to establish or maintain early successional habitats.

- urban, open spaces
- agricultural fields
- fallow fields

### 4. Reforestation:

Assistance is provided for reforestation projects from the Division of Fish and Wildlife, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Natural Resource Conservation Service and the Delaware Forest Service.

- urban, open spaces
- agricultural fields
- fallow fields



## Financial Assistance

Most programs provide some type of financial assistance. Typically, this assistance takes the form of cost-share in which a percentage of the actual restoration costs will be paid for by the State and/or its partners. Cost-share may range from 50-100%. The landowner would be required to make up the rest of the cost either through a monetary contribution or through in-kind services. Some of the programs targeted at agricultural producers provide additional financial incentives to take marginal agricultural lands out of production. These may include annual rental payments for the length of the contract based on the average land rental rate for the county. Financial assistance may also be received in the form of an easement. An easement is a legal agreement between the property owner and the conservation organization that restricts development on the property for a termed period or in perpetuity. The landowner still retains ownership of the land and the right to work and sell the property. Payments are based on the fair market value of foregone development.

## DNREC

## Division of Fish and Wildlife

**Delaware Landowner Incentive Program:** DLIP offers financial and technical assistance to private landowners interested in enhancing and/or establishing grassland, wetland and riparian forest habitat to benefit species-at-risk. Landowners may receive cost-share for wetland restoration and enhancement, establishment of upland habitat, and reforestation projects. The highest ranking individual projects will be funded.

**Delaware Wildlife Habitat Enhancement Program:** WHEP provides technical and financial assistance to enhance and/or protect early successional stage wildlife habitat. It offers \$70 per acre per year for five years to landowners that agree to set aside part of their agricultural land for wildlife. The land must either be left fallow or planted with approved species. Fees are paid in lump sum for five years upon signing a contract.

**Phragmites Control Cost-Share Program:** The Phragmites Control Cost-Share Program administered by DNREC's Division of Fish and Wildlife consists of aerial spraying of *Phragmites australis* (an invasive species commonly found throughout Delaware's wetlands) for two consecutive years with a glyphosate-based aquatic herbicide. The Division of Fish and Wildlife provides matching funds to qualifying landowners. Landowners must have between five and 200 undeveloped acres of Phragmites to be eligible for the program.

**Wildlife Conservation and Restoration Program:** Under this DNREC program, landowners may receive funding and technical assistance for the enhancement and establishment of grassland, wetlands and riparian forest habitat to benefit species of concern. Participants may receive cost-share for wetland restoration and enhancement, establishment of upland habitat, and reforestation projects.

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**Open Space Program:** Delaware's Open Space Program was established in 1990 to support the Delaware Land Protection Act. Program funds are used for the acquisition of critical land from willing sellers by the Division of Parks and Recreation, the Division of Fish and Wildlife, the Delaware Forest Service or the Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs. Once purchased, the critical area is managed by the appropriate agency as public open space to protect the natural and cultural resources.

Phil Carpenter  
DNREC Division of Fish and Wildlife  
89 Kings Highway  
Dover, DE 19977  
(302) 739-3441

## Division of Soil and Water Conservation

### Drainage and Water Management Practices:

This program provides financial and technical assistance to private and public land managers to implement Delaware's drainage and water management practices. These practices include, but are not limited, to stream corridor restoration, wetland restoration and establishing tax ditch Best Management Practices.

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89 Kings Hwy  
Dover, DE 19903  
(302) 739-4411



### Delaware Coastal Program:

This program provides technical assistance and funding, up to \$15,000 annually, to local communities (maintenance corporations, homeowner associations) for the restoration and management of community open space as natural habitat through Habitat and Natural Resource Planning, Management and Protection Assistance Grants.

David Carter  
Delaware Coastal Programs  
89 Kings Highway  
Dover, De 19901  
(302) 739-3451



## Delaware Department of Agriculture

**Agriculture Preservation Program:** The Delaware Agricultural Lands Preservation Program was established in 1991 to protect land for agricultural purposes. Under this program landowners create or join an established land preservation district in which there has to be at least 200 acres of contiguous land devoted to agriculture for a period of at least 10 years. Landowners receive the "right-to-farm," tax-benefits and the right to sell a permanent land protection easement to the State of Delaware.

Delaware Department of Agriculture  
2320 S. Dupont Highway  
Dover, DE 19901  
(302) 698-4500  
1-800-282-8685



## Delaware Forest Service

**Forest Land Enhancement Program:** Under this program, funding is set aside for reforestation, afforestation, agroforestry implementation, water quality improvement, watershed protection, fish and wildlife habitat, invasive species control and other special practices related to forest lands. To be eligible, landowners must have a forest stewardship plan, have less than 1,000 acres of forestland and must have at least five acres of non-industrial forestland. Property-owners enrolled in FLEP may receive cost share assistance of up to 50% towards implementing one of the practices listed above, and must maintain the practice for a period of 10 years.

**Property Tax Exemptions:** Under the Commercial Forest Plantation Act, landowners who manage their forests for timber production are entitled to receive a 30-year exemption from their county property taxes. To be eligible the property must have at least 10 contiguous acres of forest

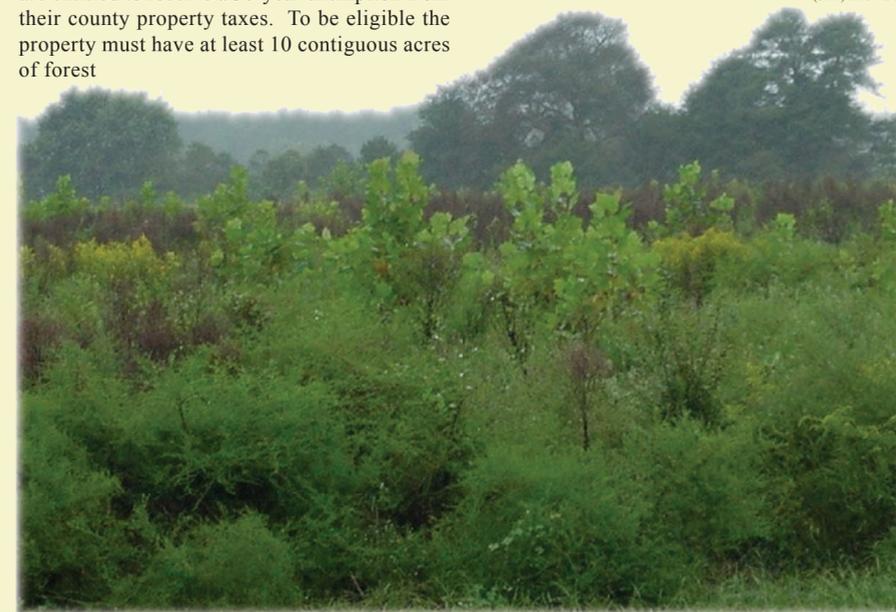
**Century Farm Program:** Under this program DDA recognizes farms that have been owned and operated by the same family for at least 100 years. To qualify, farms must include at least 10 acres of the original parcel or gross over \$10,000 annually from the sale of agricultural products.

**Nutrient Management Program:** DDA's nutrient management program provides cost assistance to landowners interested in developing nutrient management plans and transporting excess nutrients to areas in need.

land and have a forest management plan approved by the Delaware Forest Service.

**Forest Legacy Program:** FLP provides funds to states to protect working forestlands that are threatened by development or other land uses, either through outright purchase or conservation easements. Landowners who choose to sell an easement must also have a forest stewardship plan for their property that describes the activities needed to help achieve their objectives for the property; the Delaware Forest Service can write this plan with the landowner. Easements may only be purchased in Forest Legacy Areas: White Clay Creek, Blackbird/Blackiston, Redden/Ellendale, and Cypress Swamp.

Delaware Forest Service  
2320 S. Dupont Highway  
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(302) 698-4500



# Natural Resource Conservation Service



**Agricultural Management Assistance:** AMA provides cost-share payments to agricultural producers to voluntarily address issues such as water management, water quality, and erosion control by incorporating conservation practices into their farming operations. Producers may construct or improve water management structures or irrigation structures; plant trees for windbreaks or to improve water quality; and mitigate risk through production diversification or resource conservation practices, including soil erosion control, integrated pest management, or transition to organic farming.

**Environmental Quality Incentives Program:** EQUIP provides technical, educational, and financial assistance to eligible farmers to address soil, water, and related natural resource concerns on their lands in an environmentally - beneficial and cost-effective manner. The program is funded through the Commodity Credit Corporation. The purposes of the program are achieved through the implementation of a conservation plan. Five to ten-year contracts are made with producers and cost-share payments may be made to implement eligible conservation practices including animal waste management systems, buffer strips, and nutrient management.

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**Farmland Protection Program:** FPP provides funds to help purchase development rights to keep productive farmland in agricultural uses. Working through existing programs, USDA joins with state or local governments to acquire conservation easements or other interests from landowners. USDA provides up to 50% of the fair market easement value. Landowners continue to control access to their land.

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## U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Partners for Fish and Wildlife:** PFW provides technical and financial assistance to private landowners interested in restoring wetland hydrology, riparian habitat and grasslands for wildlife. PFW provides financial assistance to the landowner. In turn, the landowner must sign an agreement to maintain the habitat for a minimum of 10 years, with 20 years or longer preferred.

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Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program  
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177 Admiral Cochrane Drive  
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**Conservation Reserve Program:** CRP is an effective, voluntary approach to improving the environment using partnerships between individuals and the government. Landowners establish long-term conservation practices on highly erodible and environmentally sensitive land in exchange for 10-15 years of annual rental payments. They also receive cost-share assistance in adopting and maintaining those practices.

**Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program:** WHIP provides financial incentives to develop habitat for fish and wildlife on private land. Participants agree to implement a wildlife habitat development plan and the USDA agrees to provide cost-share assistance for the initial implementation of wildlife habitat development practices. The agreement is for five to ten years.

**Wetland Reserve Program:** WRP is a voluntary program to restore wetlands. Participants can establish conservation easements of either permanent or 30-year duration, or they can enter restoration cost-share agreements where no easement is involved. The landowner receives payment up to the agricultural value of the land and 100% of the wetland restoration costs.

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# The Nature Conservancy

**The Nature Conservancy:** The mission of The Nature Conservancy is to preserve the plants, animals and natural communities that represent the diversity of life on Earth by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive. The Conservancy selects specific places where plant and animal species can survive for generations to come. TNC employs a scientific, systematic analysis to identify places large enough in scale and rich enough in plant and animal species to ensure meaningful conservation results. At each place, TNC employs a range of strategies tailored to local circumstances. They buy and/or accept donations of land and conservation easements from willing landowners. They test reforestation and wetlands restoration techniques on lands that they own as demonstrations of natural lands management and help other landowners apply successful methods to manage their properties. The Nature Conservancy facilitates public-private partnerships. They engage the business community in practicing and supporting conservation. They collaborate with like-minded partners. They seek pragmatic solutions.

Statewide:  
100 West 10th Street, Suite 1107  
Wilmington, DE 19801 (302) 654-4707

For the Nanticoke River watershed:  
P.O. Box 730  
Seaford, DE 19973 (302)628-5171

For the Delaware Bay and its watershed:  
210 Union Street  
Milton, DE 19968 (302) 684-5348



## National Wild Turkey Federation

**NWTF's Conservation Seed Program:** For this program, agricultural seed companies provide outdated seed to NWTF chapters for planting and/or distribution. The seeds – corn, soybeans, milo, wheat and sunflowers – must be planted for wildlife only and generally cost less than \$5 per 50 pound bag.

Cissy Penner  
National Wild Turkey Federation  
1-803-637-3106  
1-800-843-6983

**Operation Appleseed:** Wild turkeys and many grassland species depend on open areas for nesting and feeding. Operation Appleseed's focus is two-fold: to develop crabapple orchards for fall and winter food sources for wild turkeys and other wildlife, and to promote the management of utility rights-of-way as simulated old field habitats.

**Wild Turkey Woodlands Landowner and Hunt Club Programs:** These programs recognize individuals and corporate landowners who manage their farms, woodland, or hunting clubs for wild turkeys and other wildlife. Eligible properties must be hunted in some way, be at least 10 acres in size, and have a management plan. Landowners can develop their own plan, or they can work with existing state and federal programs or a private consultant to develop a plan. Property owners who have a management plan may enroll as a certified member and receive a subscription to *Hunt Club Digest*, discounts on seeds and seedlings, and a Wild Turkey Woodlands sign and certificate.

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## Ducks Unlimited Incorporated

**Ducks Unlimited, Inc. Habitat Stewardship Program:** This program provides 90% cost-share to landowners wishing to restore their poorly-drained farmland to functional moist-soil wetlands, and for assistance with planting upland habitat strips adjacent to restored wetlands. DU staff biologists provide wetland surveying, planning and design, and construction management.

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410-677-3792

**Ducks Unlimited Conservation Easement Program:** DU also accepts donated easements, termed or in perpetuity, through its affiliate Wetlands American Trust. A legal agreement is formed between Ducks Unlimited and the property owner that restricts the type and amount of development on the property and protects valuable natural resources. Under the agreement the landowner retains ownership of the land and may continue to use the area for economic gain and/or recreation.

# Conservation Districts

County Conservation Districts provide technical and financial assistance to landowners and property managers interested in implementing conservation practices to control soil erosion, improve water quality, manage agricultural and animal waste, enhance stormwater basins and restore wildlife habitat. These practices and cost-share rates vary by district. For more detailed information please contact the Conservation District in your county.

**Erosion and Sediment Control Practices:** Cost-share is provided to landowners interested in installing water and sediment control basins, critical area treatments, structures, terraces, windbreaks and grassed waterways for the purpose of preventing soil erosion.

**Water Quality Practices:** Assistance is provided to landowners interested in improving water quality through nutrient sequestration and sediment filtration. Eligible practices include ditch impoundments and shallow water wetlands.

**Animal and Agricultural Waste Management Systems:** Funding is available to landowners interested in reducing nutrient and sediment loads that enter ground and/or surface water by implementing best management practices. Cost-sharing is authorized for animal waste storage



New Castle Conservation District  
Newark Service Center  
2430 Old County Rd.  
Newark, DE 19702  
(302) 832-3100, ext 3.



Kent Conservation District  
3500 S. Dupont Hwy  
Dover, DE 19901  
(302) 697-2600, ext 3.



Sussex Conservation District  
408 N. DuPont Highway, Suite B  
Georgetown, DE 19947  
(302) 856-3990, ext 3.



John A. Hughes  
Secretary

All of these programs have been instrumental in restoring and protecting habitats for wildlife and biodiversity. The potential to do more in the future is almost unlimited. If you are interested in enrolling in one of the many conservation programs listed above, or have any questions, please feel free to contact one of the biologists below.

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Photograph courtesy of Tim McCade USFWS

Promoting Wildlife Habitat