

# 2. Planning Context

Delaware's Wildlife Action Plan fits into an existing framework of statewide strategies established to conserve and protect the state's natural resources, including habitat for wildlife. These strategies focus on different approaches to conservation (e.g., land acquisition, preservation, land use, infrastructure investments, policy), but they are all coordinated and have shared mapping elements and common goals to ensure consistency in implementation.

State Strategies for Policies and Spending (1999, updated in 2004) directs where the state will most likely allocate its resources and focus state programs to address population growth and land development issues. Although decisions concerning land-use occur at the local and county level, the state can influence the way development occurs through its spending and management policies. The Strategies are based on the premise that by making wise decisions about building and managing highways, water and sewer systems, and other public facilities (commonly called "gray infrastructure"), the state can reduce the negative effects of poorly planned, unfocused growth. To implement State Strategies, Delaware's Governor issued the Livable Delaware Agenda (Governor's Executive Order #14) in 2001, and the General Assembly established the Livable Delaware Advisory Council (LDAC) shortly thereafter.

Among the 11 goals identified in the Strategies is to "protect important farmlands and critical natural resource areas." To implement this goal, the LDAC established the "Green Infrastructure" subcommittee. As defined in the Governor's Executive Order #61, Green Infrastructure, or "GI", is "Delaware's natural life support system of parks and preserves, woodlands and wildlife areas, wetlands and waterways, productive agricultural and forest land, greenways, cultural, historic and recreational sites and other natural areas all with conservation value."

The GI subcommittee directed development of maps depicting Cropland Focus Areas, Forestland Focus Areas, and Natural Resources and Recreation Land Focus Areas (Appendix A). Methods used for delineating GI focus areas are described on the map in the Appendix. These maps were used to develop goals and strategies for preserving natural resource areas, recreational lands, and working lands. Among the strategies developed for GI was to incorporate the maps into the 2004 update of the State Strategies for Policies and Spending and use these maps to direct future state program investments and to guide local land use planning. GI data layers were incorporated into the spatial analysis used to build the Strategies maps, which classify land in three main categories: lands that are not available for development, lands for which state and local policies do not favor growth, and lands for which state and local policies do favor growth.

In 1990, before State Strategies was developed, the Delaware Land Protection Act (7 Del. Code, Chapter 75) established an Open Space Program in the state. The Open Space Program coordinates the acquisition of various state lands including parks, fish and wildlife areas, forests, nature preserves and cultural sites. The program is administered by Delaware's Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control's Division of Parks and Recreation. A 9-member Open Space Council advises the Secretary of the Department on the implementation of the program and recommends specific land purchases. Quarterly meetings are held to review properties brought before the Council by an interagency Working Group. Recommendations to

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preserve properties are based on a rating of natural, cultural, recreational and locational attributes and a consideration of land use plans and purchase options.

The Land Protection Act also authorized the development of “State Resource Area” (SRA) maps for guiding acquisition of property or rights in real property through the Open Space Program. Twenty SRAs and specific stand alone sites have been designated to date, comprising over 250,000 acres and representing 19% of Delaware’s land base. SRAs are encompassed within the GI focus areas and are comprised of existing protected state, federal, local and private conservation organization lands, in-holdings and potential additions to already protected areas. The SRA maps were created in 1990 and updated in 2006 to incorporate new information available on the location of wildlife and habitat. SRAs include some of the finest examples of Delaware’s diverse natural and cultural heritage, unspoiled wetlands, mature forests, rare plant and animal habitats, geological and archaeological sites, open space for recreation and greenway connectors.

In 1978, before the Open Space Program was established, the State of Delaware enacted the Natural Areas Preservation System (7 Del. Code, Chapter 73) for the purpose of establishing an inventory of natural areas statewide and a system of nature preserves. A “natural area” as defined by the law is an “area of land or water, or of both land and water, whether in public or private ownership, which either retains or has reestablished its natural character (although it need not be undisturbed), or has unusual flora or fauna, or has biotic, geological, scenic or archaeological features of scientific or educational value.” “Nature preserves” are natural areas that have been formally “dedicated”, or estate, interest or rights transferred, to the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control, for and on behalf of the State. The state’s registry or inventory of natural areas was first created in 1978, with major updates in 1988 and minor updates since that time. The inventory is currently being updated with expected completion by December 2005. There are currently 67 natural areas identified in the state, and 19 nature dedicated nature preserves.

Regional conservation maps and strategies developed by The Nature Conservancy through ecoregional plans that encompass Delaware, and through the “Delmarva Conservation Corridor Demonstration Program” (Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002), were included in analysis identifying focus areas for Green Infrastructure natural resource preservation.