

## Appendix E. Delaware Open Space Program Acquisition Ranking Criteria

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### OPEN SPACE PROGRAM PROPERTY RANKING PROCESS

As established by the Delaware Land Protection Act, the Open Space Program is to acquire interest in real property to carry out conservation programs of the State. Under the purpose of the law, the State is “to protect and conserve all forms of natural and cultural resources; to protect and conserve the biological diversity of plants and animals and their habitat; to protect existing or planned parks, forests, wildlife areas, nature preserves or other recreation, conservation or cultural sites by controlling the use of contiguous nearby lands; to preserve sites of special natural, cultural or geological interest; to connect existing open spaces into a cohesive system of greenways and resource areas; to provide for public outdoor recreation; and to allow for water resource conservation.”.

In order to carry out the purpose of the Open Space Program, the Open Space Council is to review and recommend to the Secretary of the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control for adoption a ranking process that establishes land preservation priorities. Typically working in a constrained environment of limited funding, the ranking process is intended to provide a strategic way of preserving open space by evaluating a property on its own features and against other similarly ranked properties in order to maximize resource benefits and leverage all relevant funding sources.

Any property proposed for preservation is first screened by the following state land managing agencies for any specific interest: Division of Fish and Wildlife (Wildlife Areas and Natural Heritage sites), Division of Parks and Recreation (State Parks, Natural Areas and Nature Preserves), Delaware National Estuarine Research Reserve, Delaware Forest Service (State Forests and Forest Legacy Areas), or Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs. Typically a property of interest is an inholding to, expansion of or connection between lands protected or managed by these agencies. Additionally a property of interest may be a stand-alone site that contains critical resources. The property is also reviewed against resource plans or resource analyses, including the Delaware Ecological Network<sup>1</sup>.

Assessing the priority of a given property for preservation, either through fee-simple acquisition, donation or conservation easement is a process that involves ranking and descriptive evaluation. This ranking process is supported by science, management priorities and public needs. The ranking criteria assign points across five broad areas: ecological value, land use, water quality, recreation, and cultural

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<sup>1</sup> Weber, T. 2007. Development and application of a statewide conservation network in Delaware, U.S.A. *Journal of Conservation Planning*, Vol 3: 17-46.

resources. Once ranked, a property is evaluated qualitatively by describing other potential benefits, challenges or factors affecting preservation of the property.

**RANKING CRITERIA**

ECOLOGICAL VALUE	20 points	15 points	10 points	5 points	0 points
Plants <sup>i</sup>	Federally listed or candidate species, globally rare, or proposed state listed species documented on site or adjacent lands that may benefit from habitat protection	S1 species <sup>2</sup> documented on site or adjacent lands that may benefit from habitat protection	S2 species <sup>3</sup> documented on site or adjacent lands that may benefit from habitat protection	S3 species <sup>4</sup> documented on site or adjacent lands that may benefit from habitat protection	S1-S3 species not likely to benefit from habitat protection
Animals <sup>ii</sup>	Federally listed or candidate species, globally rare, state listed or proposed state listed species documented on site or adjacent lands that may benefit from habitat protection	S1 species documented on site or adjacent lands that may benefit from habitat protection	S2 species documented on site or adjacent lands that may benefit from habitat protection	At least 1 SGCN <sup>5</sup> likely to benefit from habitat protection	SGCN not likely to benefit from habitat protection
Habitat of Conservation Concern (HCC) <sup>6iii</sup>	Protects an existing HCC documented on site	Protects a corridor connecting two HCCs	Protects land adjacent to an HCC (potential for expansion of HCC through restoration)	Potential for establishing an HCC (must be in close proximity to other HCCs)	No potential for establishing a HCC

<sup>2</sup> S1 Species- Extremely rare with typically 5 or fewer occurrences statewide.

<sup>3</sup> S2 Species- Very rare with typically 6 to 20 occurrences statewide.

<sup>4</sup> S3 Species- Rare to uncommon with approximately 21 to 100 occurrences statewide.

<sup>5</sup> SGCN, or Species of Greatest Conservation Need, are identified according to a set of criteria provided in the *Delaware Wildlife Action Plan*. SGCN are species indicative of the overall diversity and health of the State’s wildlife resources. Some may be rare or declining, may be vital components of certain habitats, and / or may have a significant portion of their population in Delaware.

<sup>6</sup> HCC, or Habitat of Conservation Concern, are habitats that are rare, have special significance in Delaware, are particularly sensitive to disturbance, and/or have a high diversity of rare plants. Because of these factors, they are known – or expected – to harbor SGCN, especially insects that are often dependent on specific host plants.

ECOLOGICAL VALUE	20 points	15 points	10 points	5 points	0 points
Fisheries Resource Protection Areas	Protects critical nursery or spawning habitat for anadromous fish, bivalves, and shellfish	Adjacent to critical nursery or spawning habitat for anadromous fish, bivalves, and shellfish	Potential to protect and/or improve nursery or spawning habitat for anadromous fish, bivalves, and shellfish		
Forest % Cover	76-100	51-75	26-50	10-25	<10
Non-forested Wetland % Cover	76-100	51-75	26-50	10-25	<10
ESH <sup>7</sup> % Cover <sup>iv</sup>		76-100	51-75	26-50	
<b>Total (135)</b>					

LAND USE	20 points	15 points	10 points	0 points	-10 points
Proximity to Existing Preserved Lands	Necessary to use of existing preserved lands/ inholding	Adjacent to existing preserved lands	Provides a corridor between existing preserved lands		
Development Pressure	No residences or commercial structures within 0.5 miles of property	No residences or commercial structures on adjacent parcels	<5 residences or commercial structures on adjacent parcels	>5 residences or commercial structures on adjacent parcels	Proposed / approved development on property being considered (not cost effective)
On-site Buildings			Property with no building	Property with 1 building	Property with >1 building
Site Restrictions <sup>8</sup>			No site restrictions		Site restrictions
Size of Property <sup>v</sup>	>200 acres	100 - 199 acres	25 - 99 acres	< 25 acres	
Use of Property	Primarily in a natural state (>50%)	Primarily agricultural lands (>50%)	Residential/commercial use (<25% land disturbance)	Residential/commercial use (>25% land disturbance)	Intense residential use, borrow pits, waste treatment facilities, spray irrigation, landfills etc.
Access			Access exists; no improvements necessary	Access exists but improvements	Poor or no access

<sup>7</sup> ESH – Early Successional Habitat, including mixed stand of grasses and forbs, old field habitat, pastureland, and shrubland.

<sup>8</sup> Any restrictions that would affect the use of the site. For example, a former landfill which would not allow for public use.

LAND USE	20 points	15 points	10 points	0 points	-10 points
				necessary	
Public Utilities <sup>9</sup>					Above ground utilities present
Sea Level Rise (SLR) Adaptation <sup>10vi</sup>	Adjacent to land predicted to be under water at 1.5m SLR			Predicted to be under water at 0.5m, 1.0m or 1.5m SLR	Currently under water at MHW <sup>11</sup>
<b>Total (130)</b>					

CULTURAL/ HISTORICAL RESOURCES	40 points	20 points	10 points
Cultural / Historical Resources <sup>12vii</sup>	Listed on National Register of Historic Places	Eligible for listing on National Register	Some cultural/ historic interest
Threat to Cultural Resources	Immediate – approved subdivision	Potential – submitted subdivision	
<b>Total (80)</b>			

WATER FEATURES	15 points	10 points	5 points	0 points
Perennial (primary) Water Features Present <sup>viii</sup>	Unchannelized		Channelized	
Intermittent (secondary) Water Features Present <sup>ix</sup>	Unchannelized		Channelized	
Ditch (secondary) Water Features Present <sup>x</sup>			Buffered	No buffer
Waterway Frontage	>1000 linear feet	500-999 linear feet	250-499 linear feet	0-249 linear feet
Riparian Forest Buffer Size	>200'	100-199'	50-100'	0-50'
Other Vegetated Buffer		>200'	100-199'	<100'
<a href="#">Nutrient Management Critical Priority Areas</a>	Low	Medium		High
<a href="#">ERES<sup>13</sup> Waters</a>	Within ERES waters		Adjacent to ERES waters	Outside ERES waters
<a href="#">Watershed Impairment</a>	0-50%	50-74%	75-99%	100%

<sup>9</sup> Utilities – aboveground public utilities that serve more than one entity (e.g. electric transmission/distribution lines, fiber optic/cable lines, cell tower, solar panel array).

<sup>10</sup> DNREC Sea Level Rise Scenarios. Adaptations allow for landward migration of resource or loss of land due to sea level rise.

<sup>11</sup> MHW = Mean High Water

<sup>12</sup> Cultural/Historic resources means those structures, improvements, sites or lands that are listed as significant in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, either as individual listings or as contribution elements in listed or eligible historic districts (30 Del Code §1803).

<sup>13</sup> ERES – waters of exceptional recreational or ecological significance.

WATER FEATURES	15 points	10 points	5 points	0 points
Total (135)				

RECREATION (Must not adversely affect ecological resources to receive points)	20 points	15 points
Potential for High Priority Outdoor Recreation Needs as Defined in the SCORP <sup>14xi</sup>	3+	1-2
Recreational Uses (see below)	3+	1-2
Proximity to Population Base <sup>15</sup>	Level 1	Level 2
Within a Fisheries Access Area (shoreline, piers, boat access)	Yes	
Total (80)		

RECREATIONAL USES (Must not adversely affect ecological resources to receive points)	Check All That Apply
Hunting	
Fishing	
Wildlife viewing (unique species or habitat)	
Boating/kayak access (ramps and / or parking)	
Walking, jogging or bike paths / ATV, hiking, mountain biking or equestrian trails	
Sport courts	
Multi-purpose fields	
Water park/ swimming pool	
Dog park/ dog training areas	
Beach access	
Access to historic sites	
Disc golf courses	
Golf courses	
Playgrounds	
Picnic areas	
Camping areas	
Rollerblading, roller skating or roller hockey areas / skate parks	
<b>Total Number of Recreational Uses</b>	

<sup>14</sup> SCORP – Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan.

<sup>15</sup> Strategies for State Policies and Spending 2010 update - Level 1 and Level 2 Areas of Investment

Total Points For All Categories	Total Points
Ecological Value ( /135)	
Land Use ( /130)	
Cultural / Historical ( /80)	
Water Features ( /135)	
Recreation ( /80)	

**DESCRIPTIVE EVALUATION / PROJECT-SPECIFIC QUESTIONS**

**Does the acquisition support state or regional preservation and restoration priorities or management plan goals?** (e.g., Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Council's Interstate Fisheries Management Plans, Bird Conservation Region 30, Blackbird-Millington Corridor Plan, Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail, Chesapeake Watershed Implementation Plan, Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program, Delaware Forest Action Plan, Delaware Bayshore Initiative, Delaware Wildlife Action Plan, Inland Bays Watershed Restoration Plan, Nanticoke Watershed Restoration Plan, North American Wetlands Conservation Act, Partners in Flight Priority Species, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation)

**List Regional Priorities and / or Management Plan Goals here:**

**Describe why the property is considered for preservation.** (e.g., critical wildlife habitat, water quality protection, recreational opportunities, cultural resource preservation)

**Are preservation / management goals best achieved through fee title or easement, and why?**

**Is there a discount offered on the purchase price?**

**Are there opportunities to leverage non-Open Space funds? If so, identify the funding sources and percentages.**

**Describe any potential management challenges and / or costs.**

**Is there a near term plan for development?**

**For stand-alone sites, are the resources on the property significant enough to justify preservation?**

**Describe geological features of interest on site?**

Will preserving this property protect a viewshed? If so, describe the viewshed?

Is this property on the State Registry of Natural Areas?

Is there public interest in acquiring the property?

Is the owner requesting provisions in the contract / easement that would reduce the property's primary conservation values or appropriate management?

Is the property a potential restoration site?

Does the property contain a floodway? Is it in the 100 year floodplain?

Other comments:

## **PROJECT SUMMARY**

### **GENERAL PROPERTY INFORMATION**

**Owner Contact Information:**

**Tax Parcel:**

**Acreage:**

**Uplands:**

**Wetlands:**

**Watershed:**

**Agency Contact:**

**Ranking Score:**

### **ACQUISITION DATA**

**Full Fair Market Purchase:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Bargain Sale:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Donation:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Leveraged Funds:**

**Endowment/Monitoring Contribution:**

**Contract Price:**

**Comments:**

**APPRAISAL DATA**

**Appraiser:**

**Date of Appraisal:**

**Appraised Value:**

**Per Acre Value:**

**Uplands:**

**Wetlands:**

**Comments:**

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<sup>i</sup> EO Dots 2010

<sup>ii</sup> EO Dots 2010

<sup>iii</sup> Key Wildlife Habitats

<sup>iv</sup> J:\Early Successional Habitat2004.mdb

<sup>v</sup> Parcel data

<sup>vi</sup> J:\GISData\DNREC Sea Level Rise Scenarios

<sup>vii</sup> J:\parks\GISLab\Shapes\CulturalHistoric\National\_Register(2010)

<sup>viii</sup> J:\GISData\NHDWater.gdb\Hydrography\NHDFlowline

<sup>ix</sup> J:\GISData\NHDWater.gdb\Hydrography\NHDFlowline

<sup>x</sup> J:\GISData\NHDWater.gdb\Hydrography\NHDFlowline

<sup>xi</sup> J:\parks\GISLab\Shapes\SCORP