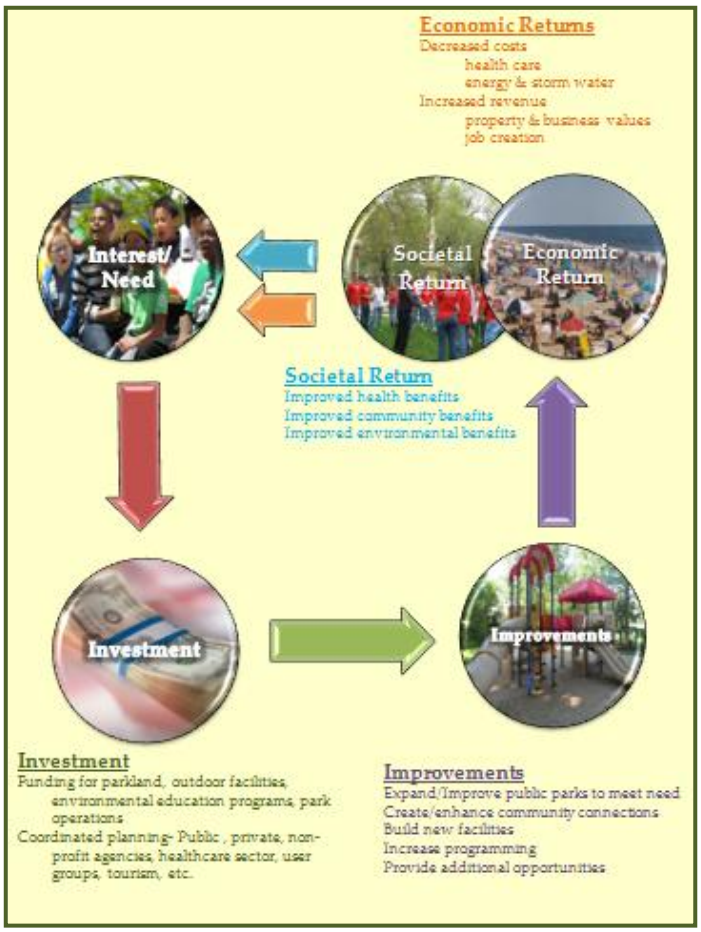
# Introduction

## *Investment in Outdoor Recreation*

Investments in parks, trails, conservation areas, and outdoor recreation facilities offer countless and long-lasting benefits to our communities including numerous societal and economic returns. Once an investment in outdoor recreation is made, it sparks a renewed interest and expanded use of outdoor recreation facilities and results in both intrinsic and measurable benefits. Investments that expand and improve public recreation facilities, increase recreation and environmental programming, improve our quality of life and contribute to communities' vibrancy. Investments in parks and outdoor recreation facilities yield returns such as environmental improvements, benefits to health and fitness, decreased healthcare costs, and increased property values.




New and improved facilities attract new recreation participants to the outdoors. When people spend time outdoors, they begin to foster an appreciation of the natural environment. Out of this appreciation comes a sense of ownership and a connection to these areas. People who have a connection to the environment around them are more likely to become stewards to those resources. Not only do they have an increased willingness to preserve these areas, but they will be more likely to participate in activities that will enhance or protect an area they feel connected.

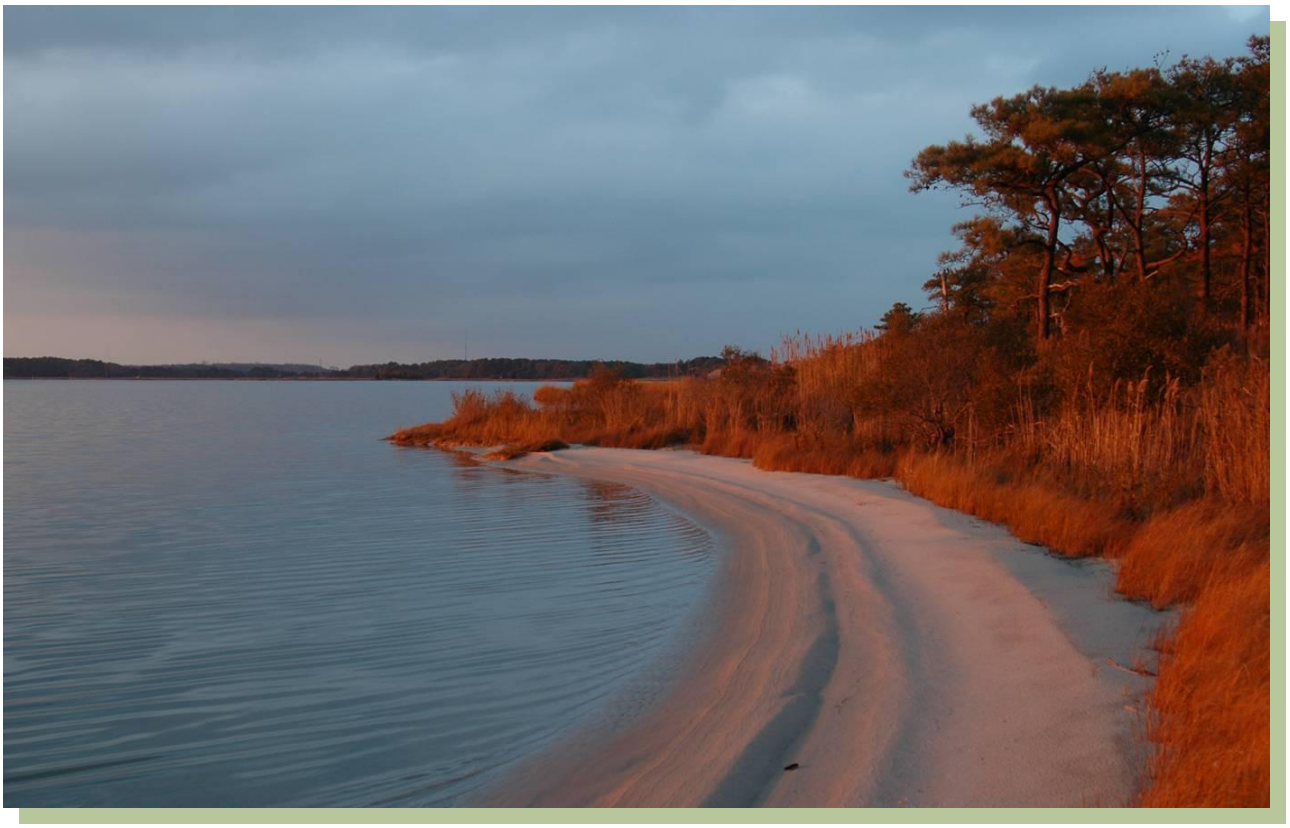
Delaware faces many challenges as it conserves land and water resources, strives to meet growing outdoor recreation needs of a changing population, as well as updating a backlog of deferred maintenance or rehabilitation of existing outdoor recreation facilities. State population projections show Delaware continuing to grow throughout the next decade. The largest demographic increase is predicted to be the 55 and older age group. With our growing and changing population composition there will be new challenges and constraints to meeting the diversity of needs. Population shifts, development patterns, public health matters, climate change, and economic conditions, make it vital to plan carefully if Delaware is to meet outdoor recreation needs.

Several funding sources have provided assistance in building parks and protecting natural resource conservation areas that today are the foundation of Delaware's outdoor recreation and conservation estate.

## *Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund Program (LWCF)*

The Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) (Public Law 88-578, 16 U.S.C. 460/-4) was established by Congress in 1964 to provide assistance to state, local and federal agencies in creating parks and open spaces, protecting wilderness, wetlands, wildlife habitat and refuges, and enhancing recreational opportunities. The program founders sought to create a nationwide legacy of quality parks, outdoor recreation and conservation areas and to stimulate non-federal investments at the state and local level across the United States.[1] Congress clearly indicated that the LWCF Program should have lasting effect on the supply of recreation sites and facilities by requiring that the sites assisted be added permanently to the national outdoor recreation estate. As a result, Section 6(f)(3) of the LWCF Act states unequivocally that grant-assisted areas are to remain forever available for "public and outdoor recreation use".

[1] www.nps.gov/lwcf



The LWCF, a U.S. Department of Interior program that is administered for Delaware by the State Division of Parks and Recreation, is comprised of a trust fund that accumulates revenues from federal outdoor recreation user fees, the federal motorboat fuel tax, and surplus property sales. A majority of funding for the program comes from accumulated revenues from off-shore oil and gas leases- thus recycling an important natural resource back to public use through park and conservation lands and recreational facilities. Current funding levels for the LWCF Program are at an all-time low. During the past decade, revenues from the outer continental shelf land leases have accounted for almost 100% of the funding source.

## *Delaware Land and Water Conservation Trust Fund (DTF)*

In 1986, the state enacted the Delaware Land and Water Conservation Trust Fund Act (DTF), a state law that mirrors the federal LWCF Program (Del. Code Title 30 ch. 54). The DTF is a matching grant program administered by the State Division of Parks and Recreation within the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control that assists county and municipal governments and park districts with park land acquisition and outdoor recreation facility development. Annually, $1 million of Real Estate Transfer Tax is deposited into the Trust with the principal intact. Trust-generated income is divided equally between park and trail projects.

DTF assistance is available for parkland, open space or greenway acquisition, planning and outdoor recreation facility development projects. Up to 50% funding is available for eligible projects while a sponsor and match may be derived from the agency's budget, other grants, in-kind sources or donations. Sponsoring agencies must agree to dedicate the project site to public outdoor recreation use in perpetuity and assume responsibility for continuing operation and maintenance of the area. To date the DTF Program has assisted 44 eligible agencies with over 300 completed projects. The $21M of DTF assistance has leveraged $56 million in local community investment. More than three quarters of the DTF projects (237) resulted in park development, 48 in park land acquisition, and 27 were directed to park planning.

## *America's Great Outdoors*

In 2010, the Obama Administration launched the America's Great Outdoors (AGO) initiative to develop a 21st Century conservation and recreation agenda. AGO recognizes that many of the best ideas come from local grassroots conservation initiatives, and calls for reworking inefficient policies and making the Federal Government a better partner with states, tribes, and local communities. As a result, the America's Great Outdoors Report, published in February 2011, proposed a number of

recommendations and actions directed towards reigniting a commitment to conserving our natural heritage. A number of the AGO recommendations overlap with the recommendations outlined within the Delaware Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan signifying a greater support for achieving shared goals. Overlapping recommendations are outlined in the Outdoor Recreation and Conservation Issues and Recommendations section of this SCORP document. *www.americasgreatoutdoors.gov*

## *Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan*

Delaware Outdoors is a planning and policy document that identifies needs in outdoor recreation throughout the state of Delaware. Identification of these needs guide the investment of funding for outdoor recreation, specifically in the distribution of LWCF and DTF monies, as well as other public and private funds. In order to remain eligible to receive LWCF grants, states are required by the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act, through administration by the Department of Interior, National Park Service, to develop a SCORP every five years.

During the development of this Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), citizens, local interest groups, municipal, county and state government agencies were asked to identify Delaware's outdoor recreation needs and concerns and provide recommendations to meet overall needs. A Technical Advisory Committee, made up of more than twenty-five local, regional, state, federal and non-governmental organizations, met quarterly to inform and guide plan development.

In developing and researching the findings reported in the 2013 SCORP, the planning process discovered changes in recreation and growth trends, community needs, and landscape preferences. Many discoveries were made in the process, such as:

- A majority of Delaware residents (93%) indicate outdoor recreation is important to their quality of life.
- 58% of residents participate in outdoor recreation for their physical fitness and to lead a healthier lifestyle.

Focus of the SCORP is regional in nature, and not intended to indicate specific locations for community parks. However, further planning to secure park land and locate specific facilities at the local level is very important.

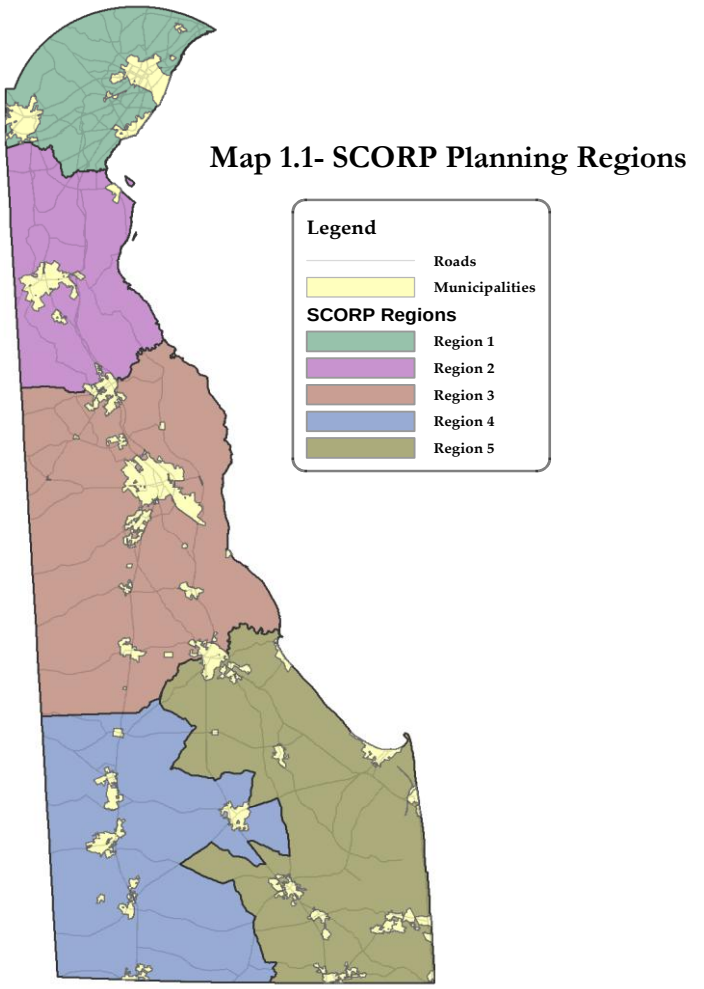
Identifying the public demand for and supply of outdoor recreation resources in the state are core components in developing this Plan. While resulting information is aggregated regionally, SCORP data and analysis will be further developed and applied at the local level to assist municipalities and counties with identifying park land locations and outdoor recreation facility enhancements that best meet public needs. Prioritizing Delaware's outdoor recreation facility needs and spatially identifying areas with the largest recreation gaps provide valuable information that direct future funding for outdoor recreation facilities.

## *Outdoor Recreation Planning on the Local Level*

Delaware is comprised of three counties and fifty-seven incorporated municipalities. State law (22 Delaware Code §702) requires every county and municipality with populations greater than 2000 residents to produce a Comprehensive Land Use Plan every five years. Comprehensive plans are required to address open space and recreation by analyzing existing park and recreation facilities available to the community and addressing recreation needs, policies, goals, and facility expansion. SCORP-based data and findings are integral in meeting comprehensive land use plan requirements. More importantly, SCORP data and findings provides information for locally-directed decision making that would result in outdoor recreation facilities that keep pace with growing and changing jurisdictions.

### *Planning Regions*

For the purpose of refining data and research findings, Delaware has been divided into five planning regions. Development patterns, population and census tracts were initially used to formulate the regional boundaries. These regions used today to present outdoor recreation demand and need data were first adopted in 2002. In an effort to track trends, the same boundaries are applied in this SCORP exhibited in Map 1.1. Regions 1 and 2 are in densely populated New Castle County; Region 3 includes all of Kent County; and Regions 4 and 5 in Sussex

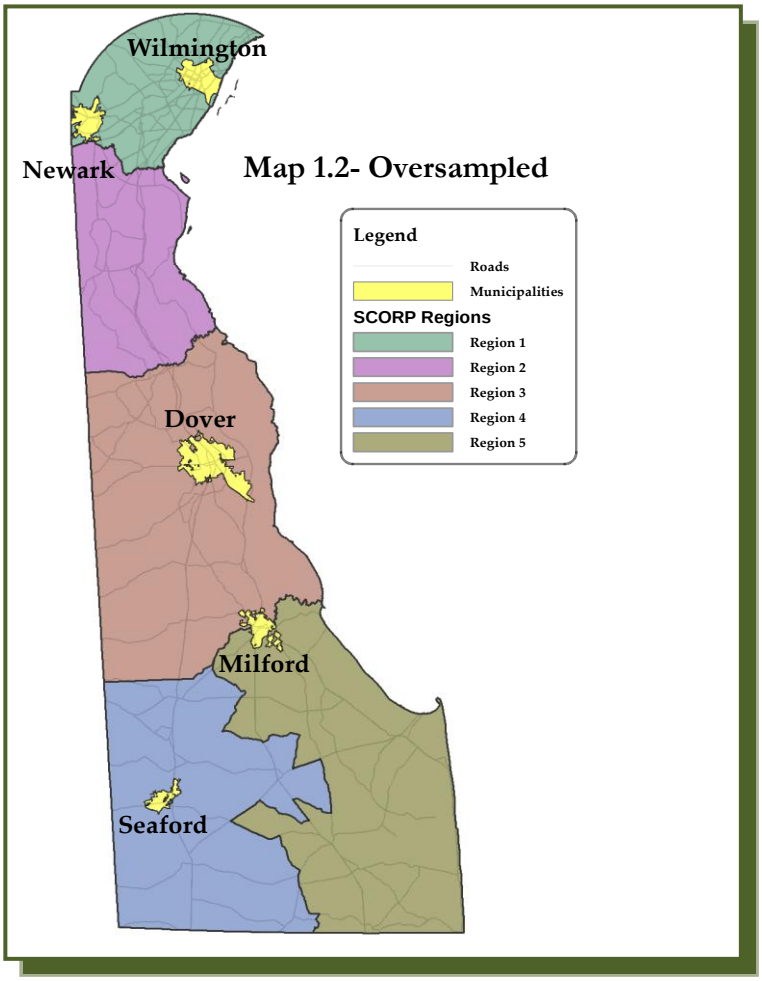



**Map 1.1- SCORP Planning Regions**

County, the state's largest and fastest growing county.

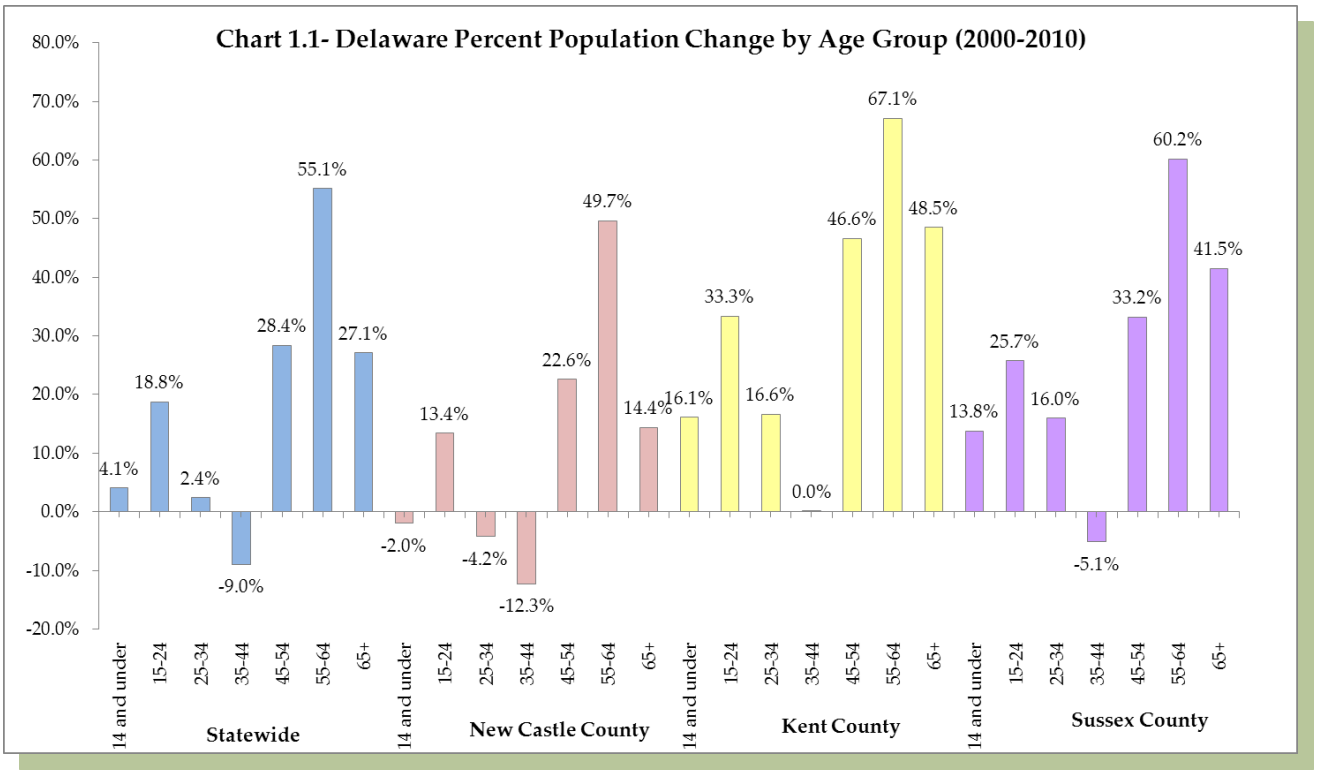
## *Municipalities*

Additional research was collected to conduct a separate analysis of five Delaware municipalities: Wilmington, Newark, Dover, Milford, and Seaford. This municipal oversampling was done to gain a better understanding of outdoor recreation patterns and demands in a smaller geographical area. These municipalities, depicted in Map 1.2, were selected because they have long-standing staffed park and recreation departments.




## *Population Growth and Trends*

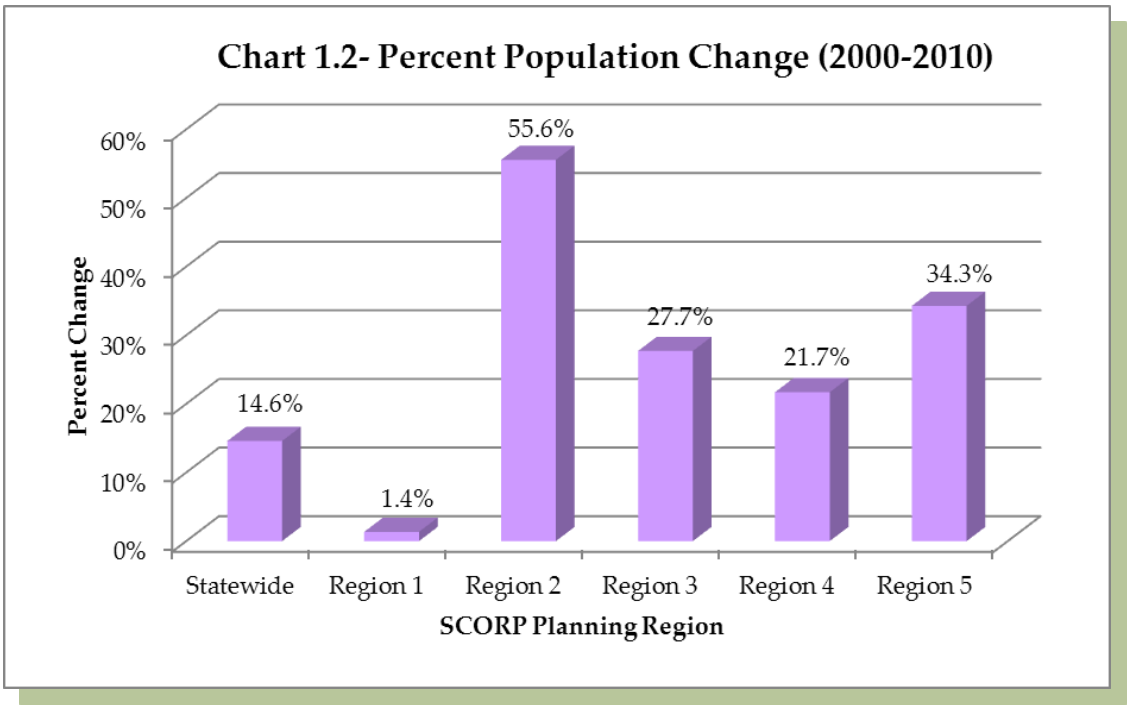
Though a small state, Delaware is centrally located on the eastern seaboard of the United States and is bordered by the Atlantic Ocean and Delaware Bay, as well as by the states of New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Maryland. Delaware's mid-Atlantic location offers convenient access to major metropolitan areas, making it an ideal place to live and still be a short car ride away from a major city. The proximity to Washington D.C., Philadelphia, and Baltimore along with low property taxes and other factors, has greatly contributed to the suburbanization of the State. Delaware's population




increased nearly 15% from 2000 to 2010. With 897,934 residents, Delaware ranked the 8th most dense state in America in 2010. Population growth was seen in all three counties and most municipalities. Chart 1.1 displays Delaware's population change by age group between 2000 and 2010. Population growth, for all but one SCORP Planning Region, outpaced the overall state growth, putting added pressure on local recreation facilities and amenities. Large population growth was particularly seen in southern New Castle County and Kent County, Regions 2 and 3 respectively. Chart 1.2 shows percent population growth for each of the SCORP Planning Regions between 2000 and 2010.

State population projections show growth continuing into the next decade although growth rates are anticipated to be slower than between 2000-2010. Projection data shows the state population increasing 9.7% to 981,922 residents by 2020. Sussex County is projected to have the greatest amount of growth (19.5%) during this time period. Table 1.1 Shows projected population trends statewide and by county.[2]

[2] Delaware Population Consortium




Nationally, the rate of land development is outpacing population growth. Delaware, too, has had its share of suburban sprawl in the past two decades. In the 15 year period between 1992 and 2007, Delaware's developed residential areas alone grew 50.9%. Land use decisions affect everyone and require quality comprehensive plans, community design standards and land use ordinances to direct growth, and its associated infrastruture, while minimizing impacts to vital natural and environmental resources. New development planned and executed around existing development: 1) puts people where community services already exist; 2) reduces costs of installing new infrastructure, keeping schools, parks, libraries, shopping and emergency services close-to-home; and 3) decreases the fragmentation of agriculture and forest, maintaining farm productivity and ecological diversity.

**Table 1.1- Projected Population by County**

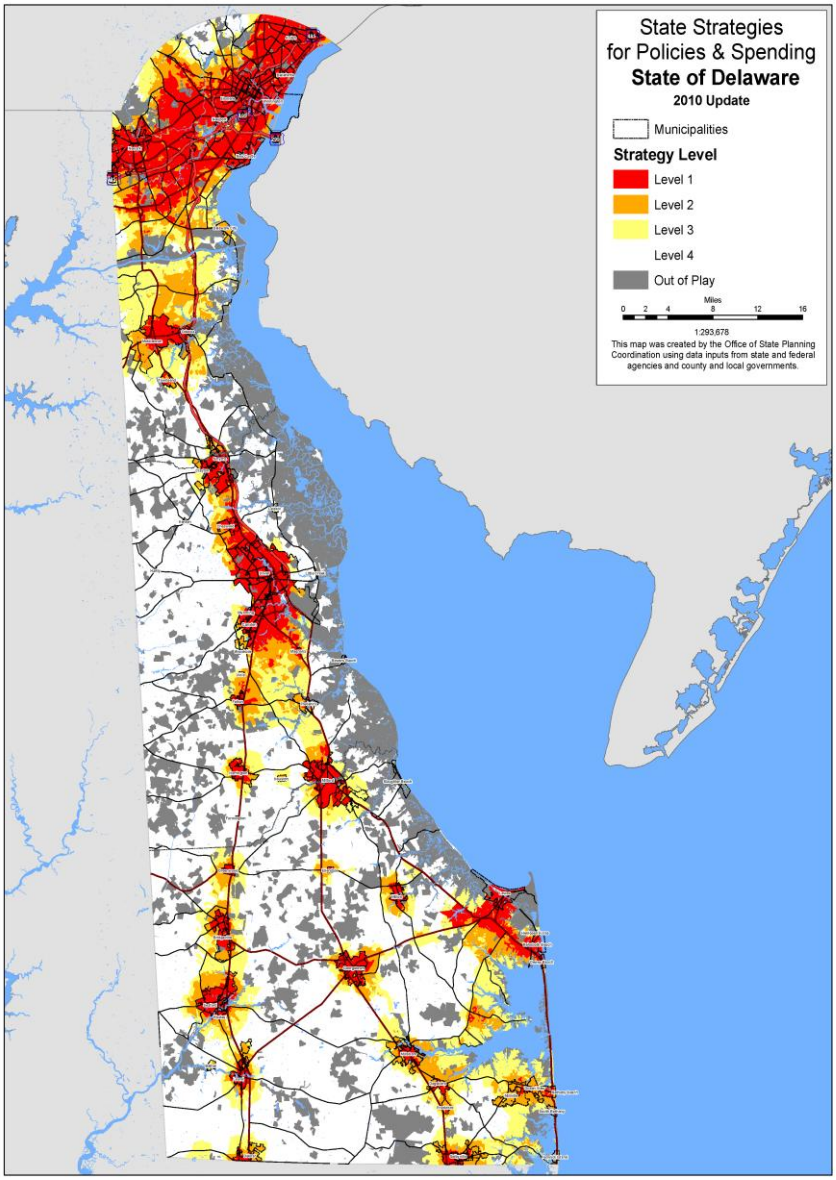
| | 2010 | 2015 | % change 2010-2015 | 2020 | % change 2010-2010 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Statewide | 895,173 | 940,449 | 5.1% | 981,922 | 9.7% |
| New Castle County | 538,170 | 554,405 | 3.0% | 567,764 | 5.5% |
| Kent County | 160,058 | 169,884 | 6.1% | 178,817 | 11.7% |
| Sussex County | 196,945 | 216,160 | 9.8% | 235,341 | 19.5% |

## *Strategies for State Policies and Spending*

In 2011, Governor Markell signed Executive Order #26, approving an update of the *Strategies for State Policies and Spending* to better coordinate land-use decision-making with the provision of infrastructure and services in a manner that makes the best use of our natural and fiscal resources. The update for the *Stratgies for State Policies and Spending* builds on the groundwork laid in 1999 and 2004. The document is a result of extensive coordination with local governments and state agencies to guide state investment decisions to promote efficient development patterns, protect agriculture and open space, discourage sprawl, and communicate with local governments on land-use matters. The State Strategies identifies Levels 1 and 2 which areas are most prepared for growth and where the state can make the most cost-effective investments in roads, schools, parks and other public facilities and services. Level 3 areas reflect areas where growth is anticipated by local, county, and state plans in the longer term, or as areas that may have environmental or other constraints to development. In the Level 4 areas,

the state will make investments that will help preserve a rural character, such as investments to protect open space and agriculture. Out-of-play areas are those that cannot be developed becayse they are protected lands or regulations prohibit development. Map 1.3 exhibits the geographic areas in the *Strategies for State Policies and Spending.*

**Map 1.3- 2010 State Strategies for Policies and Spending**




*Strategies for State Policies and Spending* supports many of the concepts that are encouraged by the park and recreation community, including preservation of open space, close to home recreation opportunities, and bicycle and pedestrian mobility. Implementation of the SCORP recommendations that encourage investments for active recreation in areas identified as 'most prepared for growth' while preserving open space in rural and environmentally sensitive areas will ultimately maintain and enhance our quality of life.