



The Urgent Need for New Forest Preservation Legislation A Case Statement from the Sussex Preservation Coalition

The Sussex Preservation Coalition has launched a **Trees = Livable Communities** campaign focused on securing comprehensive and enforceable protections for our trees and forests.

Healthy forests are an essential element of a strong and sustainable environment—from cleaning our air and water to protecting us from flooding to providing substantial economic benefits.

The Sussex Preservation Coalition (SPC) works to achieve the laws needed to support “livable communities” throughout Sussex County. Livable communities have access to critical services: health care, needed infrastructure, education, safety, and a strong, resilient, and sustainable environment, which includes clean air, clean water, and abundant open space.

We ask everyone who agrees with this case statement to help SPC move ideas into action and make Sussex a county of inter-connected livable communities.

The many Benefits of Trees and Forests

Trees Improve Water Quality

- Forested wetlands serve as sinks to slow runoff, filter water, and release clean water in waterways and underground aquifers. Streams from forested watersheds yield high-quality, clean water, and those forests are capable of storing and filtering 6x more rainfall than grass alone.¹
- Trees give us clean water. They store and filter more than half of the water supply in the United States. Forests do this by removing pollutants and sediments from rainfall, and then slowly releasing the water back into waterways and underground aquifers.²

Trees Improve Air Quality

- Trees absorb carbon dioxide (CO²), removing and storing the carbon while releasing the oxygen back into the air.³

¹ Perez-Watkins, Monica. “[Are There Trees in Your Tap?](#)” National Forest Foundation.

² Perez-Watkins, Monica. Ibid.

³ Tree People. [22 Benefits of Trees](#).

- In one year, an acre of mature trees absorbs the amount of CO² produced by a car driven 26,000 miles.⁴
- During one year, a mature tree will absorb more than 48 pounds of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and release oxygen in exchange.⁵
- Smarter management of trees, plants, and soil in the U.S. alone could store the equivalent carbon of taking 57 million cars off the road.⁶

Trees Provide Economic Benefits

- The Tree Cover in Sussex County provides \$76.1 Million in reduced air pollution, stormwater and carbon dioxide.⁷
- Every dollar spent on planting and caring for a community tree yields benefits that are two to five times that investment—benefits that include cleaner air, lower energy costs, improved water quality and storm water control and increased property values.⁸
- Research has shown that mature trees in a well-landscaped yard can increase the value of a house by 7 percent to 19 percent.⁹
- Preserving trees in developments increases a project’s attractiveness, monetary value, and marketability by improving aesthetic and functional values. Lots where trees are preserved can be sold more quickly and at higher prices.¹⁰

Trees Improve Our Health

- **Trees cool down our lives, and can even save them.** Temperatures are rising and heatwaves are getting longer due to climate change. A tree’s shade acts like natural air conditioning.¹¹

⁴ Tree People. Ibid.

⁵ Stancil, Joanna Mounce. “[The Power of One Tree—The Very Air We Breathe.](#)” U.S. Department of Agriculture.

⁶ Nature Conservancy. [6 Ways Trees Benefit All of Us.](#)

⁷ [Chesapeake Tree Canopy Network.](#)

⁸ Arbor Day Foundation. [Tree Facts.](#)

⁹ HGTV. [Increase Your Home’s Value with Mature Trees.](#)

¹⁰ Penn State Extension. [A Guide to Preserving Trees in Development Projects.](#)

¹¹ Nature Conservancy. Ibid.

- Scientific evidence shows that exposure to forests can reduce human stress levels, help us recover from attentional fatigue, and generally improve overall mood.¹²
- Spending time in a green space has also been thought to mitigate the effects of attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder¹³
- People say they feel less stressed in forests, which is linked to an actual reduction in the levels of the stress hormone *cortisol*. These lower levels lead to quicker rehabilitation times for people who are ill or injured.¹⁴
- Forest visits can also actually strengthen the human immune system, so people don't get sick in the first place.¹⁵

Forests Protect Plant and Animal Habitats

- Without biodiversity, our entire support system for human and animal life would collapse. We rely on nature to provide us with food and clean water, for a lot of medicines, and to prevent flooding and other extreme weather effects.¹⁶
- Delaware is home to over 538 different species of mammals, birds, reptiles, and amphibians. Of these, 13 species are listed as endangered in the state—and are forest dependent.¹⁷

Why We Must Act Now *The Stakes Are High*

Delaware is Particularly Susceptible to Flooding. As the lowest lying state in the U.S, at a mean elevation of 60ft above sea level along a hundred-mile

¹² Wallace, Abby. "[Five Ways Forests Benefit Human Health.](#)" National Forest Foundation.

¹³ Wallace, Abby. Ibid.

¹⁴ Wallace, Abby. Ibid.

¹⁵ Wallace, Abby. Ibid.

¹⁶ Heslop, Anne. [What is Biodiversity and Why is it Important?](#)

¹⁷ Delaware Forest Service, Department of Agriculture. "[Forest Resource Assessment.](#)"

Atlantic coastline, Delaware is vulnerable to flooding. We face an increased risk from sinking land and sea level rise.¹⁸

Sussex County Has Poor Water Quality. The most recent DNREC assessment of water pollution found that 87% of streams, ponds, and bays in Sussex were polluted due to high bacteria levels, high levels of nutrients, or low dissolved oxygen levels.¹⁹

Delaware Needs a Strong Diverse Financial Base. Trees and Forests add revenue to state and county budgets. Of Delaware’s top 9 recreational activities, at least 6 occur in forested settings.²⁰ Over 2 million people in Delaware annually participate in these 6 activities—walking/jogging, picnicking, hiking, camping, horseback riding, and hunting.

In 2016, the Outdoor Industry Association concluded that 467,000 people in Delaware participated in recreation activities such as bicycling, camping, fishing, hunting, paddling, hiking, and wildlife viewing and contributed \$3.1 billion and 29,000 jobs with 959 million in wages to the region.²¹

In Recent Decades Sussex County Has Failed to Protect Its Forests. Trees are disappearing at an alarming rate in Sussex County. Sussex County has lost 36,000 acres of forest since 1986—or **1000 acres a year**.²²

Unlike all surrounding jurisdictions, **Sussex County has NO effective codes or ordinances** protecting trees and forests.²³

Sussex County Council and the Planning and Zoning Commission will soon engage in a joint workshop to assess the need for and the best means for protecting our trees and forests.

The **Sussex Preservation Coalition** is leading a citizens’ campaign, **Trees = Livable Communities**, focused on passing a comprehensive forest and woodlands protection ordinance.

¹⁸ Delaware.gov. “[Sea Level Rise and Delaware’s Wetlands](#).”

¹⁹ [Delaware Center for the Inland Bays](#). “Sussex County Buffer Ordinance Fact Sheet,” p. 8. March 2020.

²⁰ Delaware Forest Service. Ibid.

²¹ Kauffman, Gerald K., and Andrew R. Homsey, “[Socioeconomic Value of Delaware Wetlands](#).” University of Delaware Water Resources Center.

²² MacArthur, Ron. “[In Memory of Trees Lost to Development](#).” *Cape Gazette*, May 4 2023.

²³ Borrasso, Rich. “[How Sussex Can Better Protect Its Trees](#).” April 11, 2023. Sussex Preservation Coalition.

Important Elements County Council Should Include in a Forest Preservation Ordinance

- Require a comprehensive “Conservation Plan,” including a map of the site drawn at the same scale as the grading or subdivision plan detailing areas for tree retention and reforestation.
- Set standards for all zone designations establishing the % of trees and woodlands required to be preserved based on size of parcel and proposed density.
- Stipulate locations and types of protective devices to be used during construction activities to protect trees and areas of forest designated for conservation.
- Establish guidelines to minimize forest fragmentation and to maintain and create, whenever possible, forested corridors linked to other forested tracts.
- Set provisions for tree and woodland mitigation in the form of newly created woodland areas, to be created at a standard multiplier of the amount of woodlands to be removed.
- Require tree mitigation whenever trees or woodland areas to be preserved as a condition of the “Conservation Plan” are illegally removed or disturbed.
- Require mitigation plantings to be placed on the same lot, parcel, or tract on which the illegal clearing occurred, with replacement trees of the same or a similar variety as the trees illegally removed.
- Provide incentives for landowners to retain their forested land.
- Establish disincentives for deforestation prior to development.
- Incorporate forests and forest benefits into land-use planning processes to help decrease the rate of forest fragmentation.
- Protect forested areas, particularly in high priority areas, through public and private funding.
- Establish goals for maintaining/restoring a representation of diverse and historic native forest types (species) and types of forestland (upland, floodplain/wetland, headwaters forests).
- Use Conservation easements as an economic and effective way of protecting working forests.

What You Can Do to Help

- **Educate yourself, friends, and neighbors** about the importance of trees and forests.
 - Attend monthly meetings of SPC to learn about studies and pertinent legislative actions and to hear from scientific experts and experienced advocates.
 - Visit our allies' sites for in-depth information.
 - Attend County Council and P&Z meetings.
 - Monitor the SPC website for updated information and links to other sources of information, including meeting dates, topics, and locations.
- **Join the Trees Equal Livable Communities Campaign.** Volunteer to help with meetings, education, communications or outreach. Donate funds to help SPC reach a larger audience.
- **Speak Up.** Speak during the public comment period at County Council Meetings either by phone or in-person. Get training from SPC on how to give testimony. Anyone can do it – everyone *should* do it.
- **Advocate.** Talk to your County Council member. They represent you and need to hear from you. Tell them you want them to protect our trees and forests and to reforest where possible.
- **Vote**

Frequently Asked Questions

How do I find my council district and council member?

- **To find your district,** go to the **Sussex County Government** web page: sussexcountysde.gov/county-council. Click on the **County Council** page and then on the **District Map** tab and type in your address.
- **To find your council member,** go to the **Sussex County Government** web page: sussexcountysde.gov/county-council. Click on the **County Council** page where the members are listed by District.

Are council meetings open to the public?

- Yes. We strongly encourage citizens to attend and learn about council business. For an agenda of each meeting go to: sussexcountysde.gov/county-council.



- There is a public comment period at the beginning of each council meeting when anyone can speak for 3 minutes on any topic pertinent to the council's work. We encourage everyone to use the public comment period to address your concerns. For more information on training see our website, SussexPreservationCoalition.org, or contact SPC at spcde.org@gmail.com.

How can I learn more about how county government works?

- Ask SPC to present its County Government 101 to your club, interest group, or development association.
- Attend one of our scheduled County Government 101 sessions.

I've never spoken at Council before—can I get some coaching?

- Yes. SPC has training workshops on this topic. See our website, SussexPreservationCoalition.org, for more information or contact us at spcde.org@gmail.com.

How can I contact SPC with my questions or about my interests?

- Send all questions and comments to spcde.org@gmail.com.

Contribute to the TLC Campaign: Zelle to spcde.org@gmail.com or send a check to Sussex Preservation Coalition, 179 Rehoboth Avenue, PO Box 739, Rehoboth Beach DE. 19971

The Sussex Preservation Coalition Mission

To increase the effectiveness of groups and individuals working in Sussex County to preserve natural habitats for the well-being of all communities; and to promote resiliency, sustainability, and climate adaptation.

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