Delaware Land Protection Coalition

Michelle Koenig (CIB) & Will Helt (TNC)

Sussex Preservation Coalition

July 15, 2025

Delaware Land Protection Coalition

Mission—
Protect the most ecologically, culturally, and recreationally important resources in Delaware through expanded partner collaboration and funding to meet diverse community needs.

Vision—
We envision a Delaware with interconnected open space and productive land, clean water, thriving native flora and fauna, and resilience to climate change. We envision an equitable future that enriches the lives of those who live, work, and play here tomorrow and for generations to come.

DLPC Membership

- Brandywine Red Clay Alliance
- Delaware Center for the Inland Bays
- Delaware Audubon
- Delaware Nature Society
- Delaware Dept. of Ag (Advisory)
- Delaware Dept. of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (Advisory)
- Delaware Wild Lands
- Delaware Native Species Council
- Delaware Ornithological Society
- Delaware Open Space Council (Advisory)
- Ducks Unlimited
- Kent County Conservancy
- Land Trust Alliance
- League of Women Voters in Delaware
- Mt. Cuba
- Nanticoke River Watershed Conservancy
- New Castle County Public Works
- Preservation Delaware
- Sierra Club
- Sussex County Land Trust
- Sussex Preservation Coalition
- The Nature Conservancy
- Tri-State Bird Rescue

DLPC Goals

- Increase the amount of state and county level funding dedicated to land protection.
- Implement creative solutions that enable NGO partners to assist the state in protecting critical lands throughout the state.

Why Open Space?

- **Outdoor recreation and open space is important to Delawareans and for Delawareans**. It is also a major economic driver and brings thousands of people to visit our state each year.

- **Open space is good for mental and physical health.** Time spent in nature lowers stress and provides opportunities for physical exercise and community cohesion. It is also good for mental health.

- **Open space aids in climate mitigation and adaptation, protects critical habitat, and helps achieve cleaner water.** Natural lands that make up open space serve as sponges that help control flooding and offsets carbon emissions. Forests capture and store almost 15% of the U.S. carbon dioxide emissions every year— equivalent to annual emissions of 165 million cars.

DE Open Space Program

- Created in 1990 through the Delaware Land Protection Act
- Managed by DNREC with guidance from the Open Space Council
- 100% voluntary program and includes conservation easement and direct acquisition
- Four agencies are eligible to use Open Space funding:
  - DNREC Division of Parks and Recreation;
  - DNREC Division of Fish and Wildlife;
  - Delaware Forest Service; and
  - Department of State's Division of Historic and Cultural Affairs.

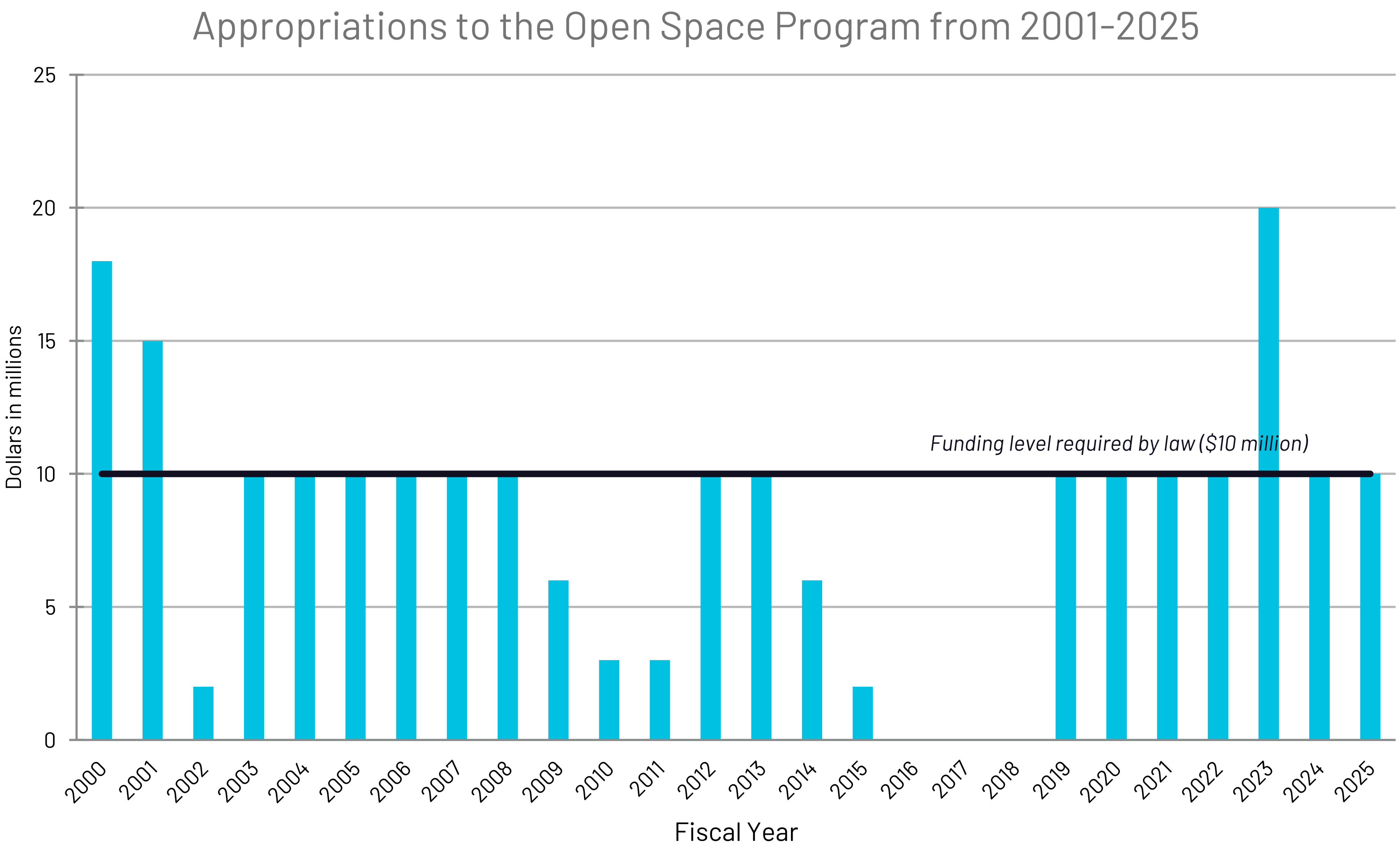
DELAWARE LAND PROTECTION COALITION

DE Open Space Program

Land and Water Conservation Trust Fund funded by a portion of the state's realty transfer taxes (30 Del. C. Chapter 54, Subchapter II)

By law, the OSP receives $10m each year, of which $1m goes into an infrastructure account and the remaining $9m becomes available for land conservation

Open Space Program Funding



Why do we need more funding?

- **The cost of land is higher than it was in 1990.** As a result, the $9 million in state funding can be spent on one - three properties very easily at current land prices and the problem will only get more challenging.

- **The purchasing power of $9 million has significantly decreased** due to land values increasing markedly and the intense development pressures in some parts of the state.

- **Development is soaring** and the opportunities to protect Delaware's biodiversity are dwindling.


2025


2022


2024


Open spaces are key to protecting our water, heritage, wellness, and way of life.

AND NOW IS THE TIME TO INVEST IN OPEN SPACE.

Maintain $10m for FY26

Delaware law mandates an annual appropriation of $10 million to the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC) for open space protection. The Delaware Land Protection Coalition (DLPC) urges the state to ensure this funding level is maintained in FY26.

Support a change in open space funding for FY27

For FY 2027, DLPC is advocating to revise the Delaware Land Protection Act to allocate a dedicated percentage of the Realty Transfer Tax and set a minimum annual funding amount of $20 million. Under the proposed changes, DNREC would receive 60% of these funds, while local governments and conservation organizations would receive 40%. This funding adjustment is crucial to addressing the rising costs of

Why is it important to preserve open spaces?

Open space aids in climate mitigation and adaptation

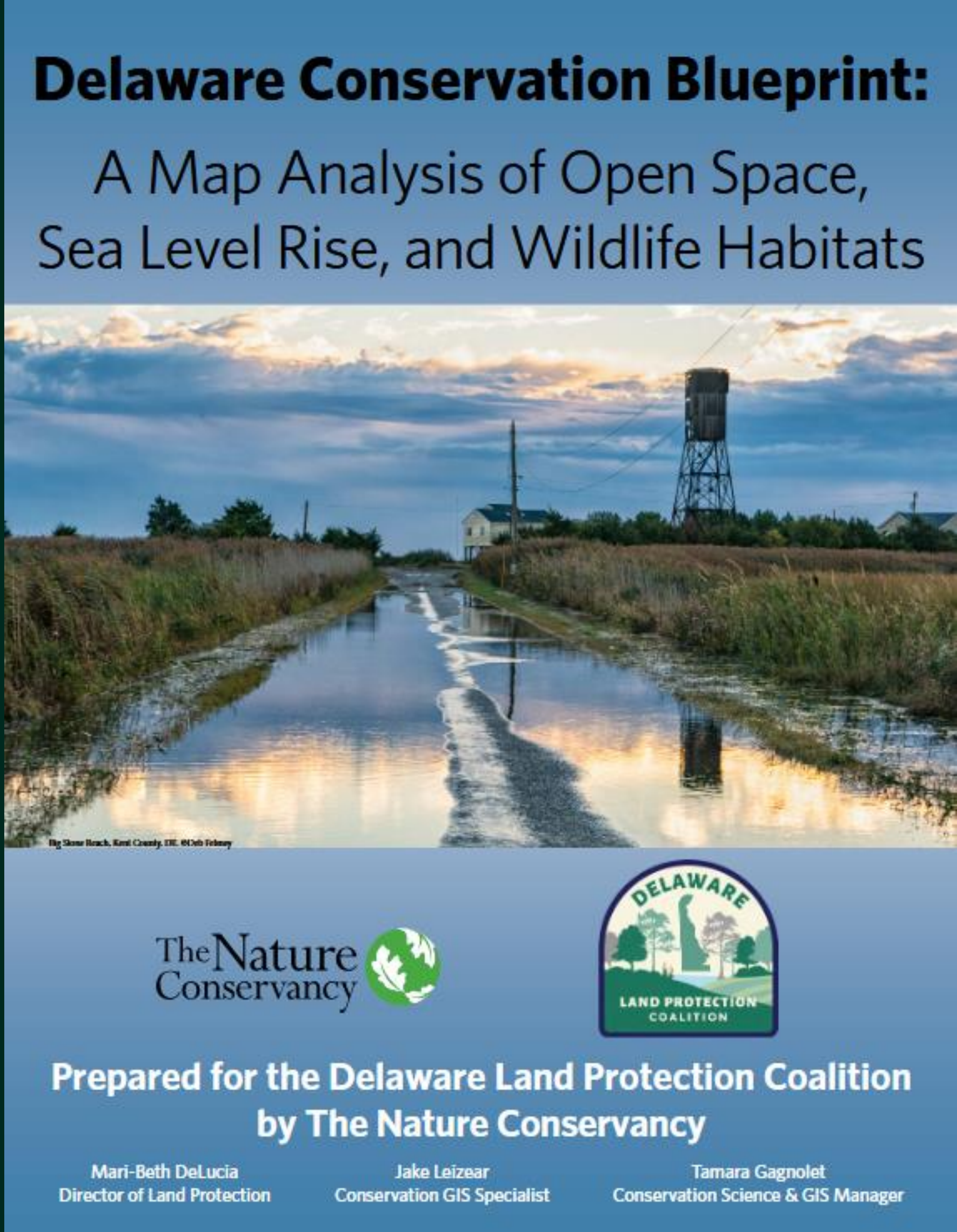
Natural lands that make up open space serve as sponges that help control flooding and offsets carbon emissions. Forests capture and store almost 15% of the U.S. carbon dioxide emissions every year—equivalent to annual emissions of 165 million cars.

Open space is good for the health of Delawareans

EVERY $1 invested in land protection

Delaware Conservation Blueprint

nature.org/DEBlueprint

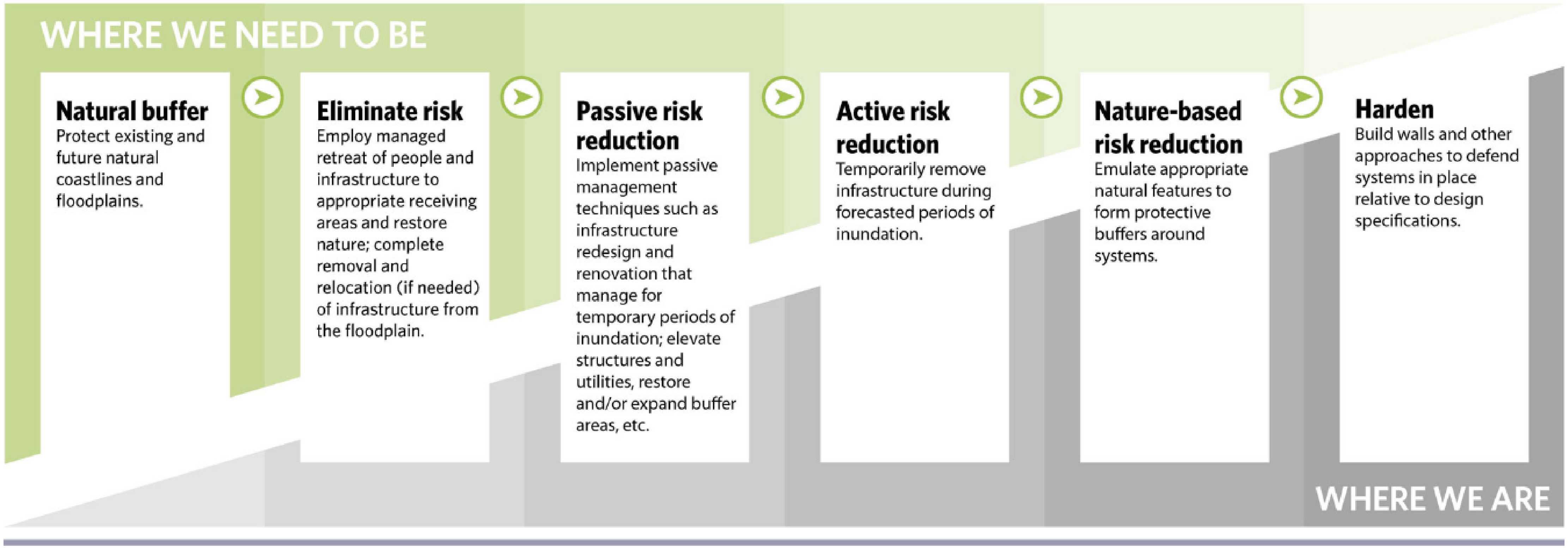


Synthesis

A new framework for flood adaptation: introducing the Flood Adaptation Hierarchy

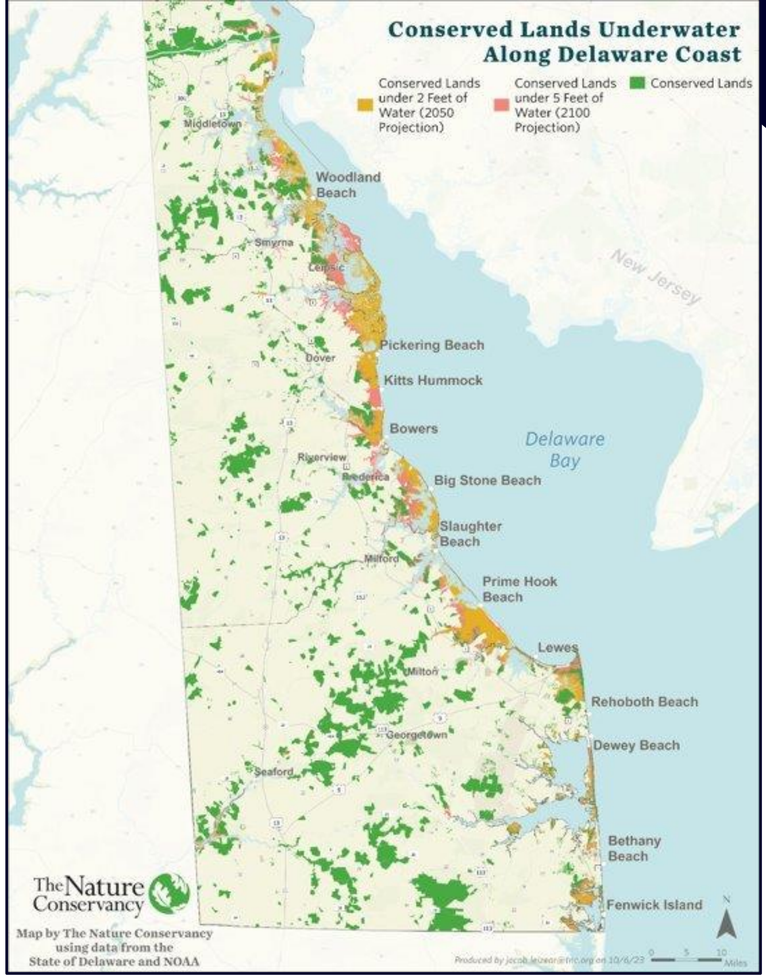
Andrew J. Peck[1], *Stevie L. Adams*[1], *Andrea Armstrong*[1], *Anna K. Bartlett*[1], *Marci L. Bortman*[1], *Alison B. Branco*[1], *Michelle L. Brown*[1], *Jessica L. Donohue*[1], *Mali'o Kodis*[1], *Michael J. McCann*[1] and *Elizabeth Smith*[1]

Fig. 1. This paper is focused on prioritizing approaches to flood risk management, not on practices or tactics. The proposed flood adaptation hierarchy ("Where We Need To Be," on the top, moving left to right) is contrasted with the current practice ("Where We Are," on the bottom, moving right to left). Clearly, all tiers will need to be deployed to achieve flood resilience at the landscape scale. However, a paradigm shift is needed to place a greater emphasis on protecting and/or restoring the dynamism of natural systems, as these features will yield more robust, long-term flood resilience than built or engineered solutions.



Why This, Why Now?

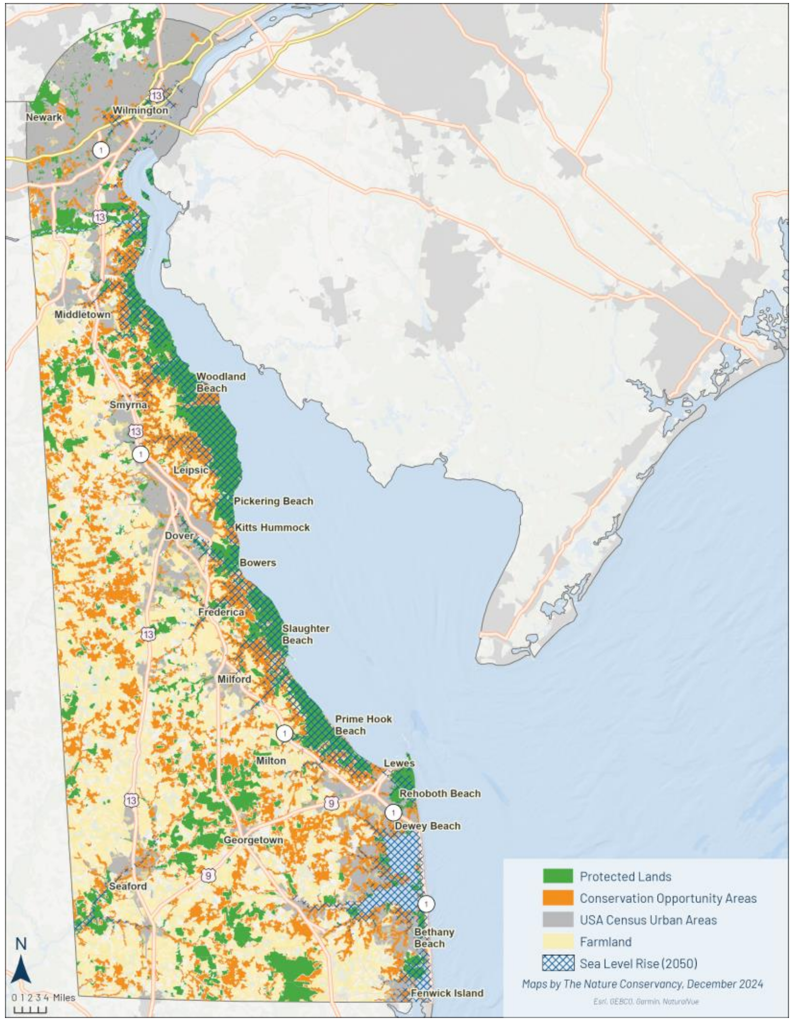
- 46% of protected lands in DE are projected to be impacted by SLR in 2050
- Increasing pressure and conversion of open space by development
- DE lacks a comprehensive framework for conserving lands that prioritizes key habitats while considering Climate Change

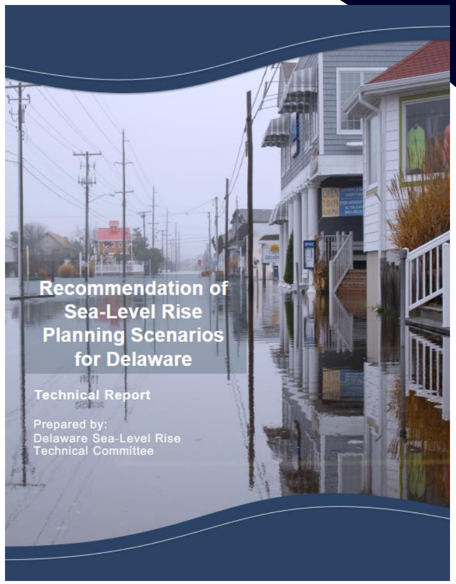


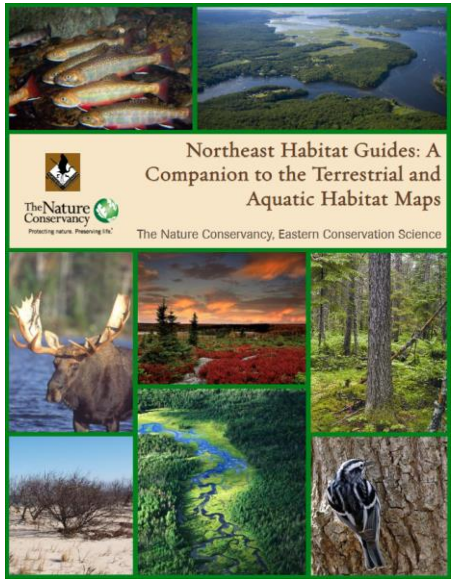
Blueprint Objective:

Conservation Opportunity Areas (COAs) focus on rare target habitats (maritime forest, beach, dune, peat swamp) of any size and other target habitats (salt marsh; swamp; hardwood forest; tidal creeks and headwaters; tidal small and medium rivers; warm, low-gradient headwaters and creeks) in patches greater than 100 acres that are adjacent to protected lands and within DE Ecological Network corridors and cores. COAs also include potential marsh/ecosystem transition zones that are in natural cover and between 5-foot and 7-foot SLR projections.

Inputs



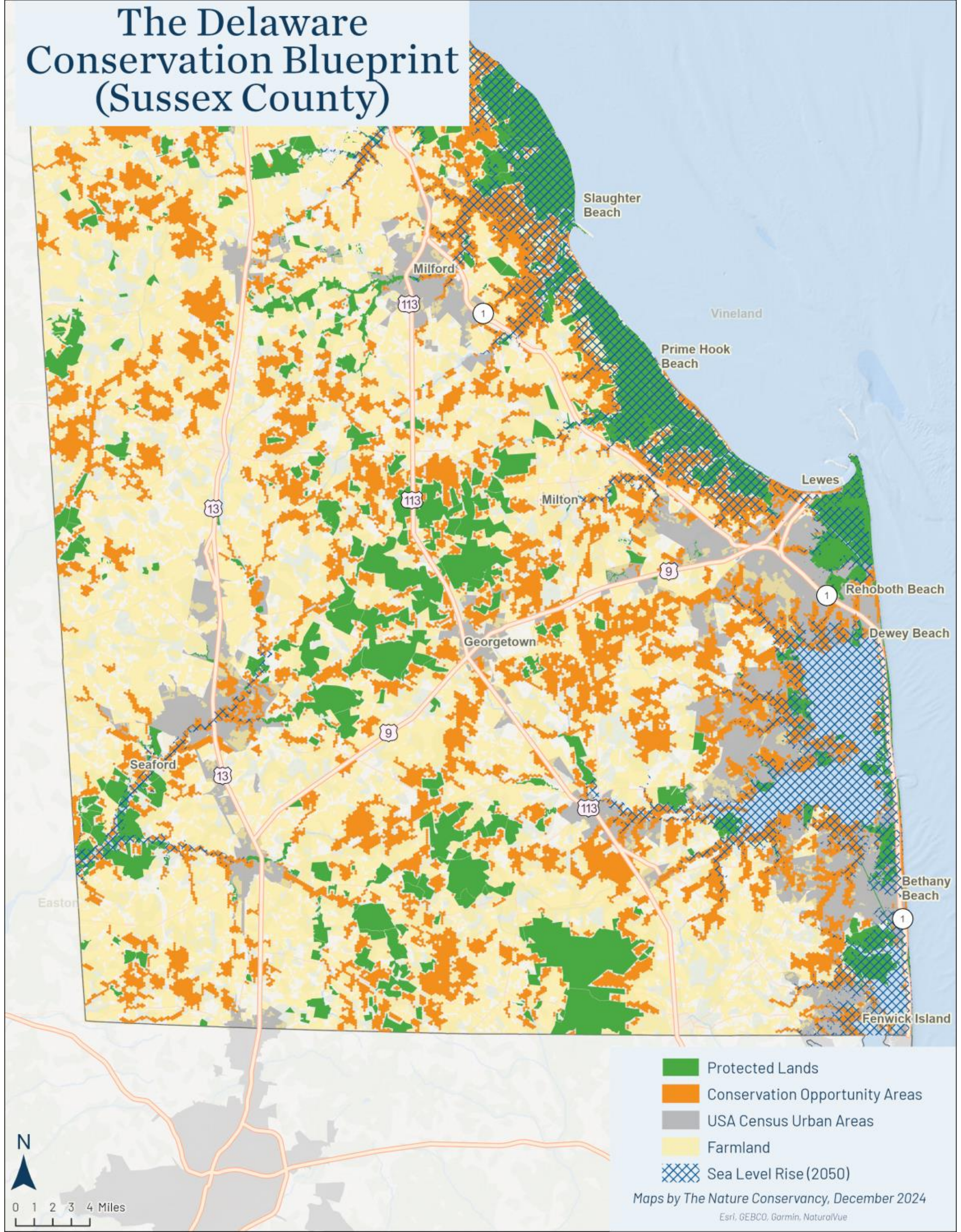




Land Use / Land Cover

DE Ecological Network

The Nature Conservancy



Delaware Bayshore Coastal Resilience Roadmap

Image Credit: William Sherman

nature.org/DEcoastalroadmap

Identified Strategies

- Protecting coastal habitat migration space
- Enhancing and restoring the ecological function of coastal habitats
- Increasing community resilience to coastal flooding
- Promoting climate-considerate policies

The Nature Conservancy

2025 State Session

- **$10 million for DNREC Open Space Funding**
- **$6.4 million for Cover Crop Funding**
- **HB 175 & HB 210 – DNREC Fee & Pollution Fine Modernization** – Updates outdated environmental fees and pollution fines
- **SB 159 – Statewide Clean Energy Planning**
- **Other work**: Blue Dasher, Red Knot, and energy bills
- **Looking ahead to 2026:** coordinated land use policies, plastics, wetlands permitting, nutrient management fine update, and challenges from federal funding losses.
- **TNC DE Policy Director:** Emily.knearl@tnc.org

Image Credit: Traveler.com

Thank You!

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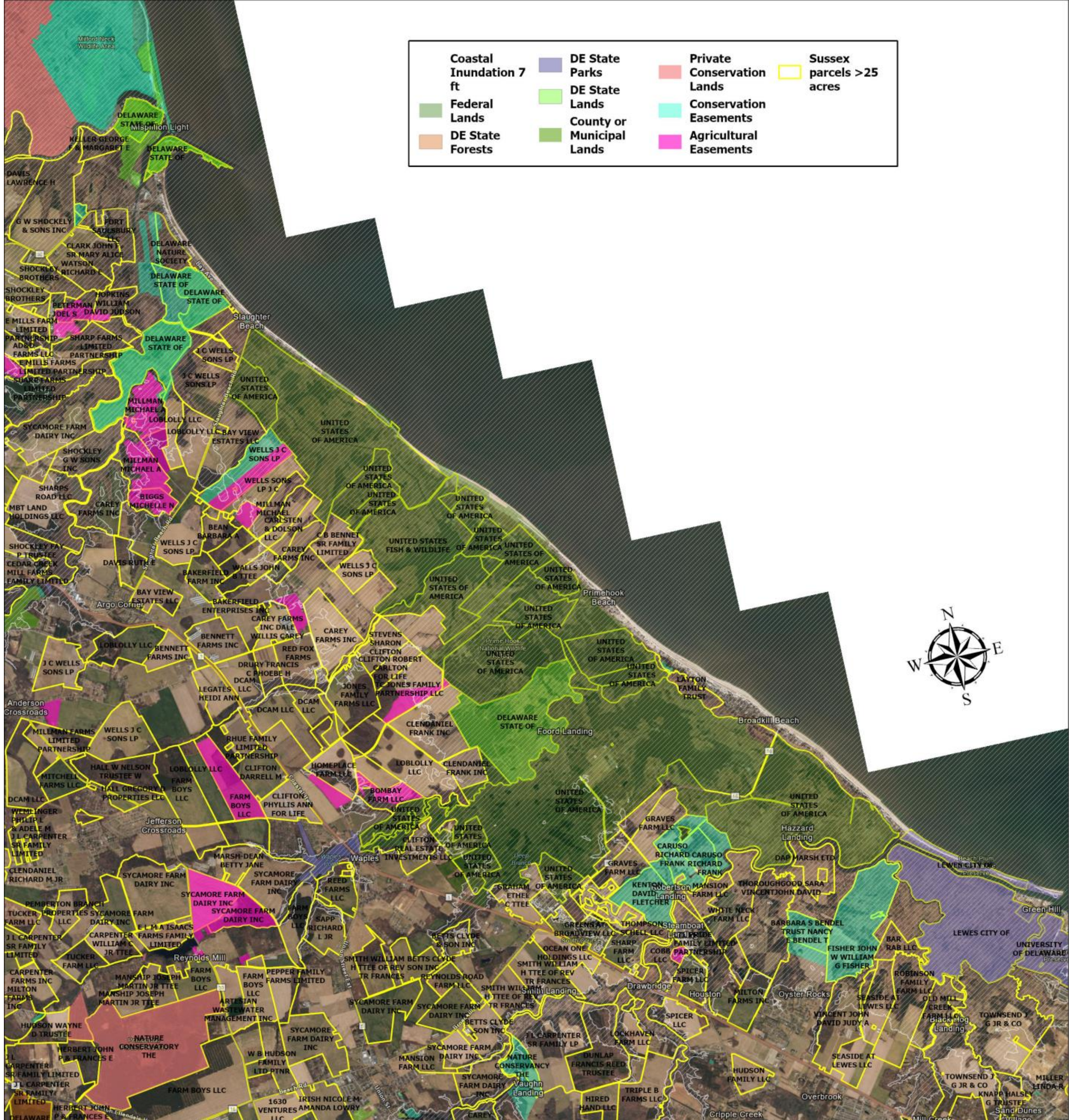
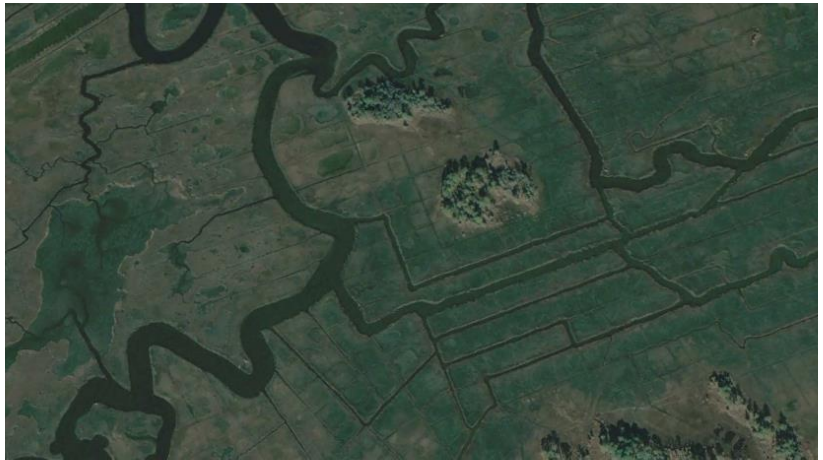
Protect Coastal Habitat Migration Space

Activity: **Strategically expand the boundaries of Bombay Hook and Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuges** to allow space for coastal ecosystems and adjacent upland habitats to migrate inland in response to SLR



Enhance and Restore the Ecological Function of Coastal Habitats

Activity: Identify, enhance, and restore priority marshes within migration corridors



Activity: Implement management practices on transitional lands to set the stage for marsh migration

Enhance and Restore the Ecological Function of Coastal Habitats

1371 Issued October 3, 1911.

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE.

OFFICE OF EXPERIMENT STATIONS—BULLETIN 240.

A. C. TRUE, Director.

TIDAL MARSHES AND THEIR RECLAMATION.

BY

GEORGE M. WARREN,

Drainage Engineer.

PREPARED UNDER THE DIRECTION OF

C. G. ELLIOTT,

Chief of Drainage Investigations

WASHINGTON:

GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE

1911.

19

DESCRIPTIONS OF THE FOUR RECLAMATIONS INVESTIGATED.

MARSH LAND NEAR DELAWARE CITY, NEW CASTLE COUNTY, DEL.

HISTORY AND DESCRIPTION.

The marsh land here considered comprises about three-fifths of the 515 acres making up three farms on the west side of the Delaware River, and situated about 1 mile south of Delaware City, Del.

First reclaimed in the early fifties, the levee was raised and the present sluice built in 1894. Cultivation has been practically continuous for over half a century and to-day the lands are carrying 110 head of cattle and 21 horses. (For plan of lands showing levee, ditch system, topographic features, and crops raised in 1909 see fig. 3.)

The tributary drainage area contains about 488 acres and varies from 1.6 to 16 feet above mean low water. The interior marsh has a dishing or "saucer-shaped" profile. Near the levee the land is from 2.5 to 4.0 feet above datum, the lower portions being in pasture (see Pl. I, fig. 1), and the higher in hay or corn. About 800 feet inland is a well-defined chain of low areas containing collectively 53 acres, and having an almost uniform elevation of 1.7 feet; this land is covered with three-square sedge. Continuing westerly, successive fields being in grass, corn, and wheat, the ground rises to the drainage line, 9 to 11 feet above datum. The foreshore averages about 200 feet wide and is covered with a rank growth of reeds and marsh grass; near the levee it has generally been raised by deposit to ordinary high-water mark. (See Pl. I, fig. 2.)

U. S. Dept. of Agr., Bul. 240. Drainage Investigations. Office of Experiment Stations.

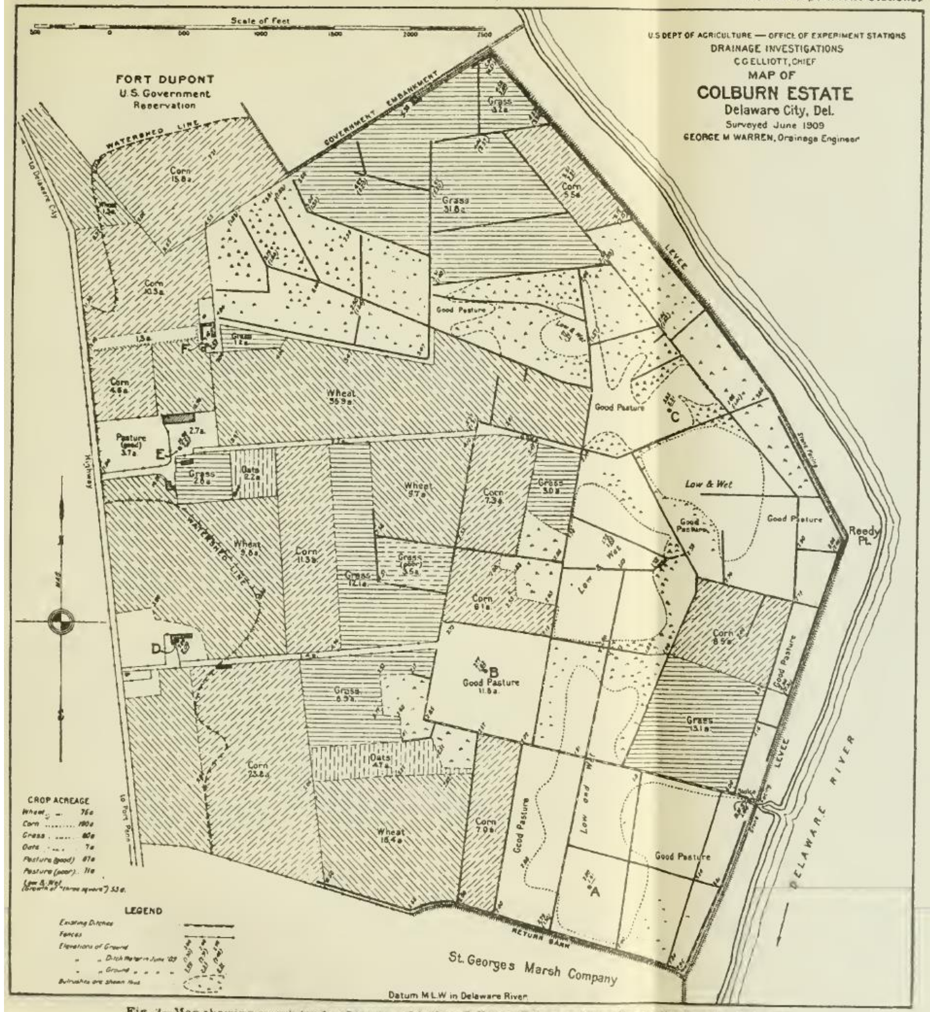


Fig. 3.—Map showing marsh lands of estate of Arthur Colburn, Delaware City, Newcastle County, Delaware.

100940°—Bull. 240—11. (Face p. 18.)

Enhance and Restore the Ecological Function of Coastal Habitats

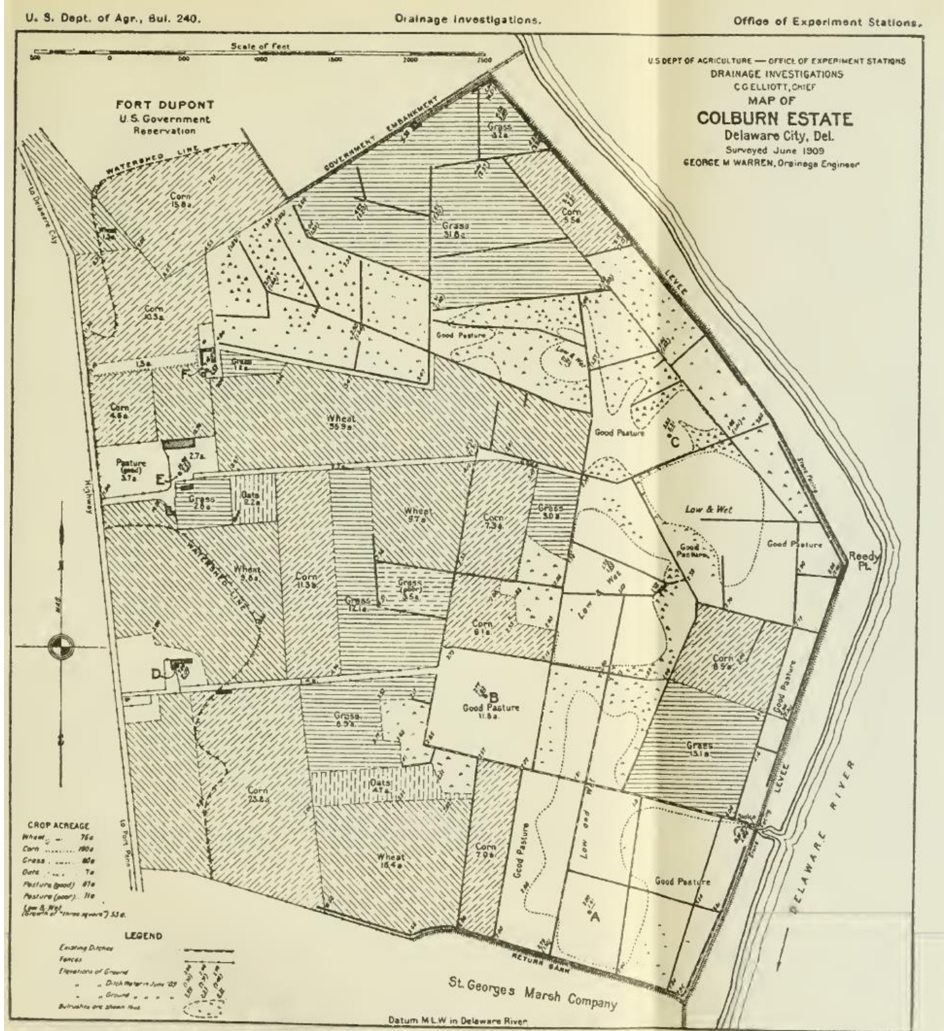
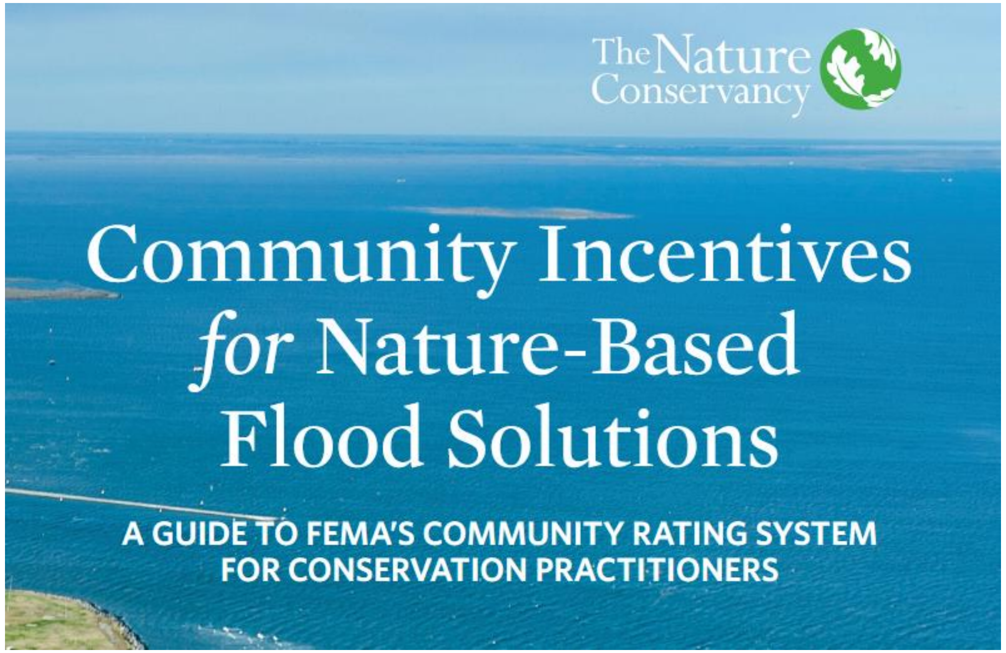


Fig. 3.—Map showing marsh lands of estate of Arthur Colburn, Delaware City, Newcastle County, Delaware.

100940°—Bull. 240—11. (Face p. 18.)

Increase Community Resilience to Coastal Flooding

Activity: Explore increased FEMA Community Rating System participation



USING NATURE TO SAVE MONEY

FEMA recently introduced changes to CRS that elevate the value of restoration and conservation of natural features like wetlands and greenspaces, making them worth more points. These changes increase the incentives for communities to combine conservation and restoration with risk reduction by creating projects that use "nature-based solutions" to enhance the natural environment while reducing flood risk. Many traditional conservation activities, such as buying and protecting undeveloped lands and restoring wetlands, are "nature-based solutions" that are creditable under CRS.

Here are some examples of how natural solutions can be used to protect communities and reduce flood insurance premiums:

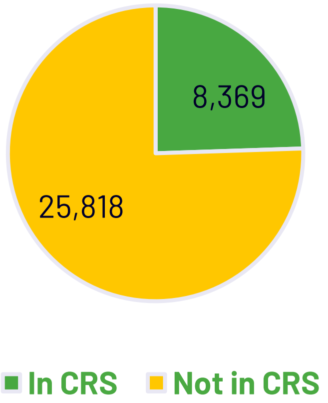
- Wetland protection: Wetland areas that are protected within the floodplain can earn CRS points because they reduce the impacts of floods by slowing down and storing flood waters. These can be existing wetlands or areas that were historically wetlands and have recently been restored.
- Open space protection: Open space, such as parks, forests and other types of greenspaces, can earn CRS points if they are protected from development. Open space protection is one of the most effective non-structural approaches to reducing flood risk.
- Living shorelines: Living shorelines, where natural habitats such as oyster reefs, mangroves and salt marsh plants are used to hold the shoreline in place, can earn CRS points. Living shorelines are becoming increasingly common across the United States and when properly designed can help stabilize shorelines and reduce risk.

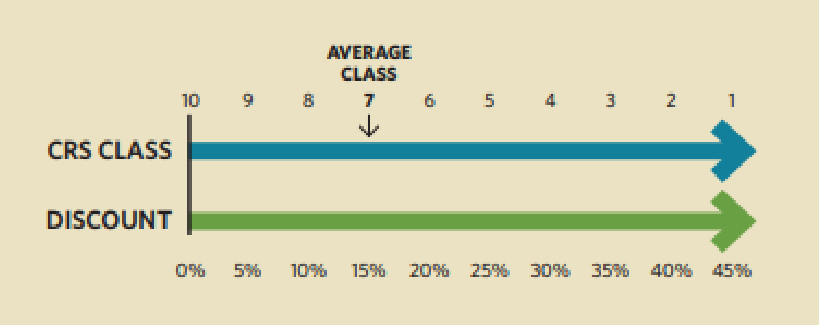
Increase Community Resilience to Coastal Flooding

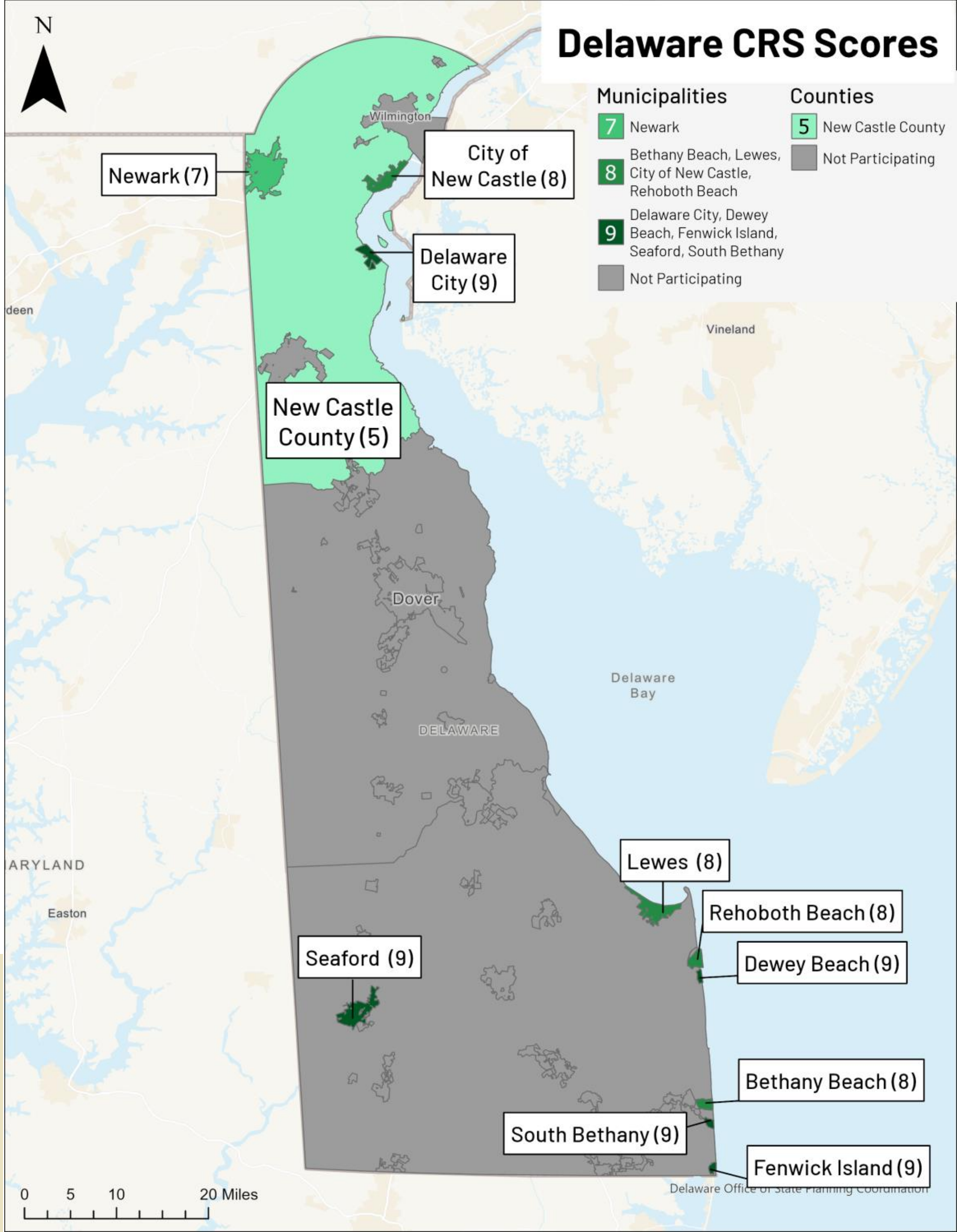
Activity: Explore increased FEMA Community Rating System participation

Jurisdiction	# of Policies	Est. Savings if CRS 7
Sussex	14,381	$1,449,173
Wilmington	846	$155,374
Kent	540	$68,120

Number of DE NFIP Policies

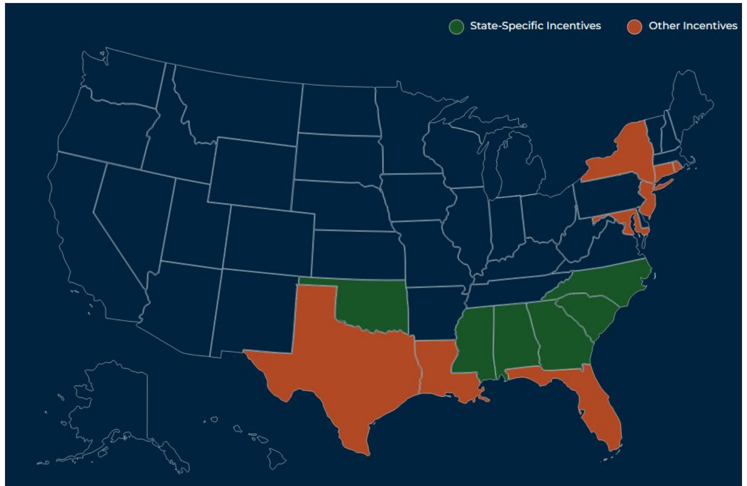






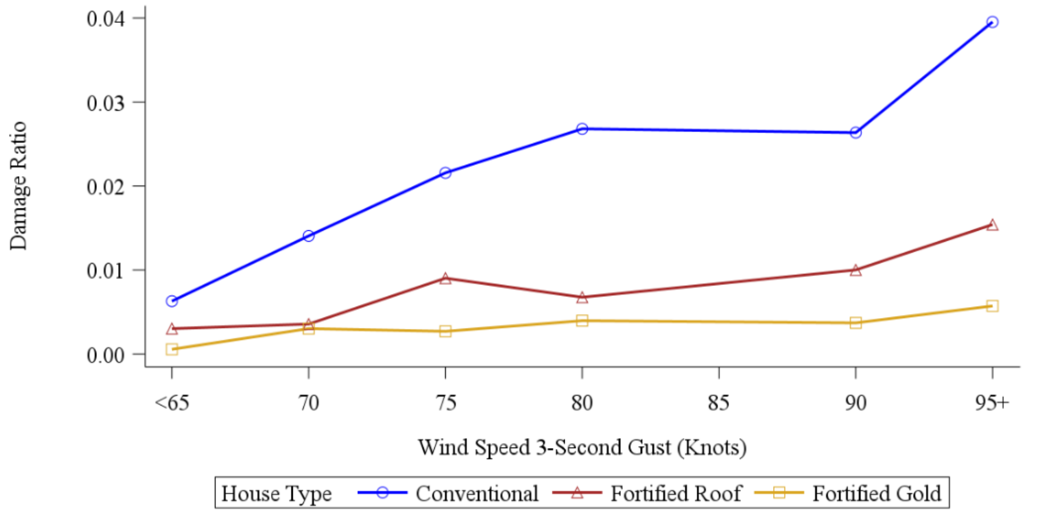
The Strengthen Alabama Homes Program

- Enabled by the Strengthen Alabama Homes Act
- Provides grants to residents for wind mitigation on single family homes (100% of cost up to $10k)
- Funded by the insurance industry in Alabama, no funding from the state or feds
- Incentivizes adopting the FORTIFIED roof standard (a program of the Insurance Institute for Business and Home Safety
- Insurers are required to offer at least a 20% discount on wind premiums for qualifying homes



Fortified Performance in Hurricane Sally

Figure 1: Damage Ratio by Wind Speed



Sample Size

	<65	70	75	80	90	95+
Conventional	8,101	3,953	5,445	4,846	1,405	1,343
Fortified Roof	413	315	464	353	91	69
Fortified Gold	458	583	1,740	2,022	408	501

Notes: Damage ratio is the losses and deductibles divided by total insured value.
Sources: ALDOI data call, IBHS, and RenaissanceRe Risk Sciences

"Insurance companies paid $149.3 million for claims in the sample policies from Hurricane Sally. We estimate that if all conventional houses were built or retrofitted to the Fortified Roof standard, insurers would have saved $99.9 million (67%) in losses… and built to the Fortified Gold standard, they would have saved $111.8 million (75%)…"
- AL Dept. of Insurance & Center for Risk and Insurance Research – Univ. of Alabama