



DELMARVA RESTORATION & CONSERVATION NETWORK

ANNUAL REPORT
AUGUST 2023

ONE DELMARVA

Photo by Dagny Leonard

LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Hello Delmarva Restoration and Conservation Network and Friends!

I am pleased to present you with the first ever DRCN Annual Report! Formed in 2017, the DRCN finally has the capacity to, among other things, produce an Annual Report and hold an Annual Meeting. This is thanks to many of you, several grants from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the Network for Landscape Conservation, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Science Applications Program. Thanks to all of you for sticking with us and assisting with our growth as a Partnership!



I'm proud that over the past seven years (my how time flies) we worked together to create and implement a first-ever Strategic Restoration and Conservation Action Plan for the entire Delmarva Peninsula. The Action Plan identified measures that will ensure habitat for fish and wildlife, working rural landscapes and waters, and healthy communities on Delmarva in the future despite changes brought about by development and climate change. The Action Plan includes a business plan that identified the need for Operating Committees to plan and implement measures to address restoration and conservation priorities. Ultimately, we formed four Operating Committees that hit the ground running. These are the Agricultural Land & Forestry Management, Land Protection, Town & Urban, and Restoration & Resilience Operating Committees. Thanks to all of you, but especially the Chairs and Co-Chairs who kept the wheels on through thick and thin.

Of the many accomplishments that you will read about in this Annual Report, two really stand out for me because they would not have occurred but for the establishment of the DRCN. First, before we even had a Strategic Action Plan, our friends from the Choose Clean Water Coalition and Ducks Unlimited presented our StoryMap to Senator Van Hollen of Maryland, resulting in the legislation that created the Chesapeake WILD grant program. Second, because we had a strong partnership and Strategic Restoration and Conservation Action Plan, we were able to obtain over \$1,000,000 from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Northeast Region to establish Marshes for Tomorrow, a salt marsh restoration and resiliency implementation program led by Audubon Mid-Atlantic and the Restoration & Resilience Operating Committee.

This Annual Report discusses not only where we've been but also where we hope to be in the future as a Partnership, thanks to valuable input from many of you! One of the things we will do soon is choose a new Chair and Co-Chair for the Steering Committee. Seven years is long enough! We need some new blood at the helm as we navigate what we expect to be a challenging future, both in the short term and the long term.

In closing, I'd like to make a special shout out to our Co-Chair Kate Patton of the Lower Shore Land Trust. Kate kept me from spinning off into space and was most responsible for keeping us moving forward through the many challenges that we faced in this ambitious endeavor.

Dan

Dan Murphy, DRCN Steering Committee Chair

WE ARE DRCN

Mission

The DRCN Mission is to restore and conserve Delmarva's landscapes, waterways, and shorelines that are special to its people, fundamental to its economy, and vital for its native fish, wildlife, and plants.

Vision

We envision a Delmarva where native fish and wildlife thrive; working lands and waters enrich the lives of those who live, work, and play here; and rich forestlands and coasts support and sustain present and future generations.

Our group's diverse make-up of non-governmental organizations, and local/state/federal agencies, allows for an approach to conservation and restoration that is locally-led, collaborative, and informed by a diversity of perspectives.

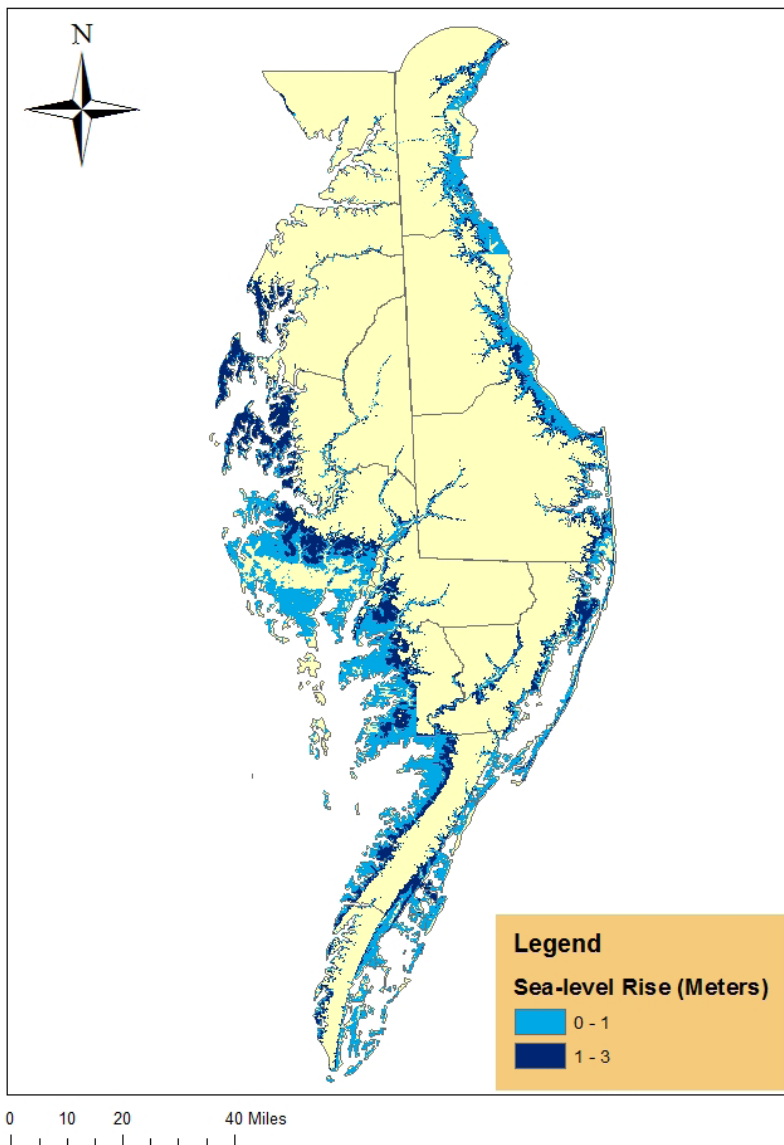


DELMARVA UNDER THREAT

As a coastal peninsula, Delmarva is particularly vulnerable to impacts from rising sea level. The global phenomenon of climate change will be felt locally as oceans swell and inundate our region. Our communities, homes, streets, wetlands, beaches, and more will be impacted. Under conservative estimates, Delmarva is expected to see at least two feet of sea level rise in the coming decades.

Considering a five-foot rise in sea level, **55,000 people** and **41,000 homes** (representing **\$19.6 billion** in real estate) would be impacted in the Maryland portion of the Chesapeake Bay by 2100.

Delmarva Restoration and Conservation Network
Sea-level Rise



Sea level rise will reach **2 feet** by 2100 according to conservative estimates.

This will result in the loss of



625 mi² of land, including



36% of tidal marshes that protect our communities from coastal storms, support healthy fisheries, and provide recreational opportunities, and



69% of ocean beaches.



\$3.9 billion are brought in by Delmarva's natural areas each year through outdoor tourism.

(Southwick Associates 2012)

THE POWER OF PARTNERSHIP

Our Structure



Committees and Meetings

DRCN members actively meet and coordinate in support of our Strategic Restoration and Conservation Action Plan. By working collaboratively, we are able to break down organizational silos and leverage resources in order to achieve habitat and water quality goals. Each year, the DRCN holds an Annual Meeting open to all. Our Steering Committee meets quarterly each year. Two of these meetings are open to the public and two are for members only.

Project Highlight - Marshes for Tomorrow

One of the most significant impacts of climate change on Delmarva's landscape is the loss of our extensive tidal salt marshes to sea level rise. Marsh loss is already well underway in the Maryland Coastal Bays, with scientists predicting the near disappearance of today's marshes by 2100. DRCN's Restoration and Resiliency Operating Committee is focusing on salt marsh restoration through an ambitious restoration planning effort called Marshes for Tomorrow.



Photo by US Fish & Wildlife Service

The goal of Marshes of Tomorrow is to create an implementation plan for tidal marsh restoration on a landscape scale in Maryland. The plan is needed to accelerate restoration and save this endangered ecosystem from sea level rise. The initiative targets the most vulnerable part of the marsh system, the high marsh zone that sits above the reach of daily tides. It will prioritize 25,000 acres of marsh and determine what maintenance actions are needed over the long term. The acreage is the minimum amount of marsh needed to support the Saltmarsh Sparrow, a rapidly declining bird that breeds only in the high salt marsh and could go

extinct within 30 years if no action is taken. Since no other plan yet exists for tidal marsh restoration in Maryland, this small bird could save an entire ecosystem, along with the benefits to fisheries, tourism and local communities that marshes provide.

Marshes for Tomorrow is overseen by the DRCN's Restoration and Resiliency Operating Committee, which provides an established group of partner organizations to assist the effort. This partnership approach was key to securing the project's initial funding of \$1.6 million, which was granted to Audubon Mid-Atlantic by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Northeast, Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program to coordinate the planning process and to begin putting restoration projects on the ground on private lands. Audubon has organized several teams to undertake the work:

- **DRCN's Restoration and Resiliency Operating Committee** acts as a technical advisory group.
- **A Core Analysis Team** of wetland researchers and restoration practitioners is guiding the spatial analyses needed to identify the priority marshes and determine which restoration practices are appropriate in them.
- **A Community Engagement Team** of conservation professionals based in the project's region of Dorchester, Somerset, and Worcester Counties is engaging local communities to hear their stories about marshes and solicit input to the restoration strategies that the planning process will create for each county.
- **A Salt Marsh Assessment and Restoration Team (SMARTeam)** of restoration practitioners will guide and support the implementation of projects in Dorchester and Somerset Counties. This Chesapeake SMARTeam is modeled on the Maryland Coastal Bays SMARTeam established two years ago.



Photo by David Curson

The planning process for Marshes for Tomorrow is expected to be complete by December 2024, but the implementation of marsh restoration in Maryland's cherished tidal marshes will continue for decades to come.

Capacity Building and Active Coordination Across the Network

There are many organizations funding and implementing restoration and conservation actions on Delmarva, but communication between and among conservation organizations and initiatives is frequently disconnected. The DRCN is designed to break down these silos and facilitate communication among organizations to coordinate goal setting, project opportunities, and funding applications.

Additionally, capacity continues to be a challenge for environmental organizations, as many groups lack the capacity to engage in landscape-scale planning and collaboration efforts on their own. The DRCN addresses this challenge by bolstering the combined multi-organizational capacity needed to adequately implement a Delmarva-wide restoration and conservation plan.

Special thanks to our key convening organizations for their leadership and the staff capacity they provide to the DRCN:



Kate Patton
Steering Committee
Co-chair

Jared Parks
Agricultural Land
and Forestry
Management
Committee Chair

Beth Sheppard
Agricultural Land
and Forestry
Management
Committee Co-
chair

Owen Bailey
Towns/Urban
Committee Chair

David Satterfield
Land Protection
Committee Chair

Dan Murphy
Steering
Committee Chair

Sophia Seufert
Coordinator

David Curson
Restoration
and Resilience
Committee Co-
chair

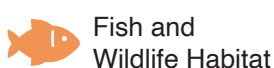
Erik Meyers
Restoration
and Resilience
Committee Co-
chair

Through this collaboration, we have successfully applied for several grants to fund coordination of the network and have acquired funding to implement landscape-scale planning such as the Marshes for Tomorrow project. Additionally, we recently received congressional funding thanks to Senator Koons of Delaware, to aid in the addition of further organizational capacity as we continue to implement and update our Strategic Restoration and Conservation Action Plan.

Project Highlight - Chesapeake “WILD” Grant Program



On October 30, 2020, the Chesapeake Watershed Investments for Landscape Defense (Chesapeake WILD) Act became law as a direct result of the presentation of an early DRCN Story Map to Senator Van Hollen by DRCN partners from Choose Clean Water Coalition and Ducks Unlimited. The Chesapeake WILD Grant Program, executed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and administered by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, authorizes up to \$15 Million per year for a grant program that focuses on five pillars:



In its inaugural year (FY 2022), Chesapeake WILD was funded at \$4 Million. The program awarded \$3.5 Million to 12 projects, including four projects on Delmarva, with grantees leveraging more than \$4.5 million in matching funds for a total conservation impact **over \$8 million**. Chesapeake WILD remains an important would not have happened without the strong landscape-scale partnership that is the DRCN!

Chesapeake WILD Investments on Delmarva

Restoration Planning for Northwest Creek - Alliance for the Restoration of Northwest Creek (ARNC) - Kent Island, Maryland

Design and permit a restoration plan for Northwest Creek, a 100-acre tidal inlet on Kent Island that has been plagued with deteriorating water quality and habitat conditions for many years. Project will create new habitat for shallow water fish species and protected breeding grounds for other wildlife via the creation of marsh habitat and living shorelines.

Protecting Habitat Migration Corridors Between Blackwater and the Nanticoke River Watershed - Eastern Shore Land Conservancy - Dorchester County, Maryland

Complete conservation easements in a critical wildlife habitat and marsh migration corridor between Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge and the Nanticoke River watershed. Project will permanently protect 300 acres through strategic landowner outreach efforts and support long-term resilience of wildlife populations and critical ecosystems of the Maryland's lower Eastern Shore.

Enhancing Waterfowl Management Capacity at the Doe Creek Wildlife Management Area - Ducks Unlimited, Inc. - Accomack County, Virginia

Enhance water management capabilities at Doe Creek Wildlife Management Area on Virginia's Eastern Shore through new water control structures and resilience improvements. Project will improve management of 147 acres of tidal wetlands for waterfowl and recreational benefit.

Strategic Plan Implementation - Delmarva Restoration and Conservation Network (DRCN) - Chesapeake Bay watershed of the Delmarva Peninsula

The project supports the coordination of the DRCN at a critical time, when collaboration among partners is scaling up to deliver restoration and conservation priorities and take advantage of new funding streams that address habitat loss, climate resiliency, under-resourced communities and water quality.

COLLECTIVE IMPACT ON DELMARVA

REPORTED DRCN MEMBER ACCOMPLISHMENTS SINCE CONVENING IN 2017



**\$5.7
Million**

of capacity funding
obtained for DRCN-
related work



**\$119
Million**

obtained for
conservation and
restoration projects



1,109

technical assistance
consultations provided
to landowners about
restoration & land
protection opportunities



33,836.5

acres of land protected
(through easements
and acquisition)



5,794.9

acres of terrestrial
habitat (including
wetlands) restored



2,917

acres of habitat
restoration planned
or in-progress

THE PATH AHEAD

Since our creation in 2017, the DRCN has made great strides towards our goals. We have brought together a diversity of key-convening partners around the peninsula to lead committees and coordinate the group's day-to-day functions. The network is coming together regularly to share updates, coordinate on projects, and brainstorm solutions to our common challenges. Through our website and newsletter, we have provided digital forums to share information across organizations. Our committees are working on truly collaborative projects: from the Restoration & Resilience Committee's "Marshes for Tomorrow" project ... to the Town & Urban Committee's effort to draft a "Model Coastal Resilience Element" to encourage local governments to incorporate adaptation into their comprehensive planning.

However, our work is not finished. In order to maintain this momentum, it is crucial that we think long-term about our group's capacity and continue searching for creative ways to leverage funding for multi-year facilitation and network coordination.

Our vision for the next phase of this work includes a "Strategic Planning 2.0" of-sorts, to assess the appropriateness of the goals we set in our original Strategic Restoration and Conservation Action Plan, given the lessons of the last 7 years. In this next phase, it will be critical that we think about the most effective ways to illustrate the scale, scope, and pace of the threats to Delmarva's natural resources. We need compelling and visual resources to illustrate the importance of this region and raise the visibility of the network (and the Peninsula) to existing and new funding sources, elected officials/policymakers, and local stakeholders.



Photo by Kate Patton



Photo by Marcia Pradines

JOURNEY WITH US

Want to support us or keep learning more?

1. Sign up for our newsletter by emailing delmarva@gmail.com.
2. Take a look at our member list and see what organizations are working near you - many host local events that allow you to make small-scale change in your community!
3. Be a Delmarva ambassador – teach others about the Peninsula’s unique ecological and cultural value, and what the impactful work groups in the DRCN are doing to protect it.

After all there’s only one Delmarva.



DELMARVA RESTORATION & CONSERVATION NETWORK



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Photo by US Fish & Wildlife Service