

Wildlife Groups Join Forces to Protect Delaware Bayshore Habitat

National Wildlife Federation and Delaware Division of Fish and Wildlife to safeguard endangered habitat and combat rising sea levels

DOVER – Critical habitat for shorebirds, water birds, waterfowl, and fish is under growing threat from rising sea levels driven by manmade climate change.

That's the focus of a grant to the [National Wildlife Federation](#) from the Wildlife Conservation Society through its [Climate Adaptation Fund](#), established with support from the [Doris Duke Charitable Foundation](#). A \$250,000 investment is being made to work in partnership with the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control [Division of Fish and Wildlife](#) (DFW) for the project *Climate-Smart Coastal Impoundments – Replacing Lost Functions and Values*, an innovative effort to shift key coastal habitats inland in the face of rapid sea-level rise.

“This grant from the Wildlife Conservation Society will help ensure that the vital habitat of the Ted Harvey State Wildlife Area continues to sustain critical wildlife and provides premier hunting and birding experiences,” said Delaware Governor Jack Markell. “We are grateful for the partnership of the National Wildlife Federation as we advance our Bayshore Initiative to conserve our remarkable natural resources, promote outdoor recreation, and strengthen our state economy.”

“The National Wildlife Federation is excited to continue our excellent partnership with the State of Delaware to implement this climate-smart coastal impoundment project as part of the Delaware Bayshore Initiative,” said [Austin Kane](#), National

Wildlife Federation Mid-Atlantic Regional Center's Science and Policy program manager. "This is an opportunity to not only make a difference in Delaware, but to set an example for managing coastal impoundments all along the Atlantic Coast, and benefit the many migratory birds and other wildlife species that depend on them."

"Enhancing and restoring our world-class wildlife habitat is a top priority of the Delaware Bayshore Initiative," said DNREC Secretary Collin O'Mara. "This project will help preserve critical habitat for shorebirds, waterfowl and other wildlife for generations to come by adapting our impoundment infrastructure in the face of emerging climate impacts and sea-level rise."

"In the face of the threats posed by sea-level rise, we need to ensure that this unique habitat type is still available for key wildlife species," said Rob Hossler, Division of Fish and Wildlife environmental program manager. "Developing a strategic retreat approach, whereby small impoundments are constructed inland, is one of many climate-smart conservation projects being considered to both maintain and relocate our coastal impoundment habitat."

The Mid-Atlantic region is the epicenter of a sea-level rise hotspot, with local sea levels rising three to four times the global average.

In Delaware, accelerated sea-level rise is threatening many rich coastal wildlife habitats. Coastal impoundments are especially endangered, where fresh and brackish water provide habitat for a wide array of wildlife including shorebirds, water birds, waterfowl, and fish species.

Recent assessments have shown these impoundments and their habitats to be highly vulnerable to sea-level rise, with a significant risk that many will be completely destroyed.

Delaware's coastal impoundments are important habitat to birds

such as red knot, least sandpiper, short-billed dowitcher, American black duck, least bittern, great egret – all of which are Species of Greatest Conservation Need identified in [Delaware's Wildlife Action Plan](#).

Losing these critical coastal habitats would be devastating in Delaware and along the East Coast, where migrating bird species depend extensively on coastal impoundments. If coastal impoundments are lost or water levels cannot be managed to provide food sources, roosting habitat, and nesting areas, the result could be significant loss of bird species populations and may also result in extirpation, or local extinction, of some breeding species from the state.

For this project, National Wildlife Federation will work with DFW to construct two new coastal impoundments at the [Ted Harvey Wildlife Area](#) that are inland and upland of existing impoundments. The new impoundments will serve as alternative habitats for those expected to succumb to rising seas.

Lessons from this effort will be shared with additional conservation partners throughout the Mid-Atlantic and East Coast, encouraging similar management approaches at other coastal impoundments to ensure that these important coastal habitats continue to be available to support the East Coast's vast populations of migratory birds and other important wildlife species.

The [National Wildlife Federation](#) is America's largest conservation organization inspiring Americans to protect wildlife for our children's future. For more National Wildlife Federation news, visit www.nwf.org/news.

This project is part of DNREC's Delaware Bayshore Initiative, a landscape approach to restore and protect fish and wildlife habitat, increase volunteer participation in habitat stewardship projects, enhance low-impact outdoor recreation and ecotourism opportunities, and promote associated

environmentally compatible economic development.