

State awarded \$1 million federal grant to protect critical lands in the Delaware Bayshore

DOVER – More than 800 acres of valuable coastal lands in the Delaware Bayshore, will be conserved and protected thanks to a federal grant awarded to DNREC's Division of Fish and Wildlife. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's North American Wetlands Conservation Act award of \$1 million will be used, along with matching funds from the state Open Space Program, conservation partners and private contributors, to acquire property along the Bayshore in Kent County. Nearly ten conservation partners have pledged matching funds that helped to make the grant award possible.

"Our appreciation to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, our Congressional Delegation and our partners for their tireless efforts in protecting our precious Bayshore lands and providing access to premier Bayshore habitat," said Governor Jack Markell. "By conserving this land, we can offer world-class outdoor experiences supporting ecotourism, helping to ensure a diverse natural legacy for future generations."

The grant and support from critical partners will conserve lands that will fill a gap in a network of more than 4,000 acres of protected wetlands and uplands in the St. Jones River watershed. The conservation of these lands is a key priority of the Delaware Bayshore Initiative that protects coastal wetlands and globally significant wildlife habitat and expands public access and low-impact recreational opportunities. The conserved lands will provide opportunities for hunting, fishing, birding and other wildlife watching, photography and nature study activities.

“We are extremely grateful for the generous financial support of Mt. Cuba Center and the hard work of DNREC’s team in securing this important grant that will help preserve critical lands along the Delaware Bayshore,” said Richie Jones, state director of The Nature Conservancy’s Delaware Chapter.

Delaware’s matching cost share for the grant is anticipated to be about \$2.2 million in Open Space Program Funds and partner contributions. Partners include: Mt. Cuba Center; The Nature Conservancy, Delaware Chapter; Ducks Unlimited; Delaware Wild Lands; Delmarva Ornithological Society; DuPont Company; the Town of Bowers Beach and Mayor Ron Hunsicker; Delaware Greenways; and Kent County Conservancy.

“Delaware’s Bayshore is a precious environmental resource and it is vital that we act as good stewards to protect and preserve these important areas for generations to come,” said Senator Tom Carper. “Striking a balance between economic development and environmental protection for Delaware’s coast has been a guiding principle that has proven successful for the First State, and I hope our approach can be a model for other coastal states.”

“Delaware’s majestic wetlands are a source of great beauty and pride in our state and it’s important that we protect them for future generations to enjoy,” Senator Chris Coons said. “With this federal grant, DNREC, the Mt. Cuba Center, The Nature Conservancy, Ducks Unlimited, Delaware Wild Lands, the Delmarva Ornithological Society, and many other private conservation organizations have significantly advanced the Delaware Bayshore Initiative. The nearly 800 acres that will be acquired will link some of the most beautiful pieces of coastal Delaware, and the land will allow sportsmen, sportswomen and farmers in the future to continue enjoying this undeveloped corner of land.”

“Delaware is blessed with a beautiful natural habitat that draws residents and visitors from across the region. It is

our responsibility to care for this resource and preserve areas like the Bayshore for future generations to enjoy,” said Congressman John Carney. “Thanks to this federal funding, the support of DNREC, and many other partners throughout the state, we can meet this challenge, while supporting the businesses in our ecotourism industry. I’m glad to see this project is moving forward and excited for more people to discover the tremendous beauty that’s right in our backyard.”

The Delaware Bayshore Initiative builds on the state’s long-standing commitment to conserving our coastal zone and on the Delaware Bayshore’s reputation as a unique and beautiful natural resource, worthy of protection. The Initiative received national recognition as one of 100 projects included in the U.S. Department of Interior’s America’s Great Outdoors 50-State Report highlighting some of the country’s most promising ways to reconnect Americans to nature. Launched last May at an event in Slaughter Beach, former U.S. Department of the Interior Secretary Ken Salazar called the Delaware Bayshore a “landscape of national significance.”

“This North American Wetlands Conservation Act grant builds upon a half-century of public-private partnerships that have conserved more than 115,000 acres along the Delaware Bayshore,” said DNREC Secretary Collin O’Mara. “By leveraging federal, state and private resources to meet the goals of the Delaware Bayshore Initiative, we are connecting wildlife areas and enhancing ways for the public to experience our precious natural lands.”

Lands that will be conserved include coastal salt marshes that provide important year-round habitat for waterfowl like American Black Duck as well as nesting habitat for Saltmarsh Sparrow, Seaside Sparrow and Black Rail, a species of high regional importance. Much of the East Coast’s population of the Red Knot feed along central Bayshore beaches during spring migrations and will benefit from protected roosting habitat resulting from this federal grant and key partner

contributions. The Bayshore's coastal forests and wetlands also provide valuable foraging and resting habitat for songbirds during spring and fall migrations.

"Ducks Unlimited is excited to partner with the Delaware Division of Fish and Wildlife and others on the Delaware Bayshore Land Conservation Initiative," said Ducks Unlimited (DU) Regional Biologist Jake McPherson. "The acquisition of significant coastal wetlands into the existing state lands network not only ensures quality habitat for migrating and wintering waterfowl, but also offers increased recreational opportunities for outdoor enthusiasts; both of which are imperative to DU's mission."

"The natural beauty, abundant open space, and diversity of habitat along Delaware's coasts are the result of a long-standing tradition and generations of dedicated commitment to land conservation," said Kate Hackett, executive director of Delaware Wild Lands. "The award of this highly-competitive federal grant highlights the critical importance of protecting Delaware's coastal resources and exemplifies what can be achieved when public and private interests work together. Delaware Wild Lands is pleased to work in close partnership with the state and others to protect nearly 800 acres of crucial wildlife habitat, expand networks of conserved lands and natural resources, and foster a greater appreciation and awareness of the defining natural beauty and character of Delaware's coastal resources."

"Delmarva Ornithological Society is proud to join the State of Delaware and other partners in supporting the Delaware Bayshore Land Conservation Initiative," said Society President Matthew Sarver. "The society's many volunteers raise thousands of dollars for bird conservation through our annual Bird-A-Thon event. We are pleased to see these hard-earned donations leveraging significant funding for conservation of our coastal marshes, including many bird species most threatened by loss of habitat to sea level rise. We need to invest now in land

conservation to ensure the Delaware Bayshore continues to provide the resources that these birds need into the future.”

The Delaware grant was part of \$19.5 million in grants announced today by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Dan Ashe awarded through the North American Wetlands Conservation Act. The funding will support 18 U.S. projects in 15 states and seven projects in Mexico that will protect, restore, or enhance more than 170,000 acres of habitat for migratory birds. The grants will be matched by \$57 million in partner contributions.

“Protection of wetlands ensures that hunters, anglers, and wildlife watchers and photographers can continue to enjoy these precious resources,” Director Ashe said. “Wildlife recreationists make up nearly 30 percent of the U.S. population and contribute more than \$100 billion to our economy.”

The North American Wetlands Conservation Act is the only federal grant program dedicated to the conservation of wetland habitats for migratory birds. Through the Act’s U.S. Standard Grants Program, 3,300 partners have been involved in 910 projects affecting more than 7 million acres of habitat.

For more information on the Delaware Bayshore Initiative, contact Karen Bennett, Delaware Bayshore Initiative Coordinator at 302-739-9124 or visit DNREC’s website by clicking [Delaware Bayshore](#).

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*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.