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## Sen. Hansen, environmental groups launch the “Delaware Freshwater Wetlands Project”

DOVER — In collaboration with over a dozen community partners, **Senator Stephanie Hansen** announced a new initiative for local students this spring called the “Delaware Freshwater Wetlands Project.” This project is designed to help teach students of all grade levels about the importance of Delaware’s wetlands through participation in an art contest, an essay contest, and an inaugural Delaware Freshwater Wetlands Day on June 9, 2023.

Wetlands play an important part in our state’s environmental landscape. They are among the most complex and productive habitats in the world, with a greater diversity of species than many other ecosystems — even including rainforests and coral reefs. In a freshwater wetland, dead leaves and other plant matter will decompose in the water, forming bits of organic material that power organisms all the way up the food chain. In addition to their biodiversity, wetlands play an important role in our environment by filtering out toxic substances from our water supply. Moreover, wetland plants and soils store carbon instead of releasing carbon dioxide into Earth’s atmosphere, which helps to moderate global climate conditions.

“Freshwater wetlands play a vital role in the health of our ecosystem here in Delaware. From filtering our water supply and reducing flood damage, to providing habitat for many of our state’s most fragile and endangered species, the role that freshwater wetlands play is critically important,” said **Sen. Stephanie Hansen**. “Yet, many of these areas are unprotected and we lose more of them to development and other human-driven factors every year. The plight of the Bethany Beach Firefly is one example that has often been highlighted, but there are many more species whose continued existence in Delaware is in jeopardy.”

The Bethany Beach Firefly species occurs only in a limited range of shallow seasonal wetlands among the dunes of Delaware’s Atlantic coast. The Bethany Beach firefly is so specialized, any change to its habitat is dangerous. Diminished water quality, recreational activities, light pollution, pesticides, and sea level rise all pose threats to this native species.

“Schools within the Caesar Rodney School District (CRSD) occupy large tracts of land that have largely been kept as mown turf of minimal habitat value. Much of this space is underutilized, nearly impervious, and exacerbates downstream stormwater flows while degrading water quality,” said Dr. Todd Klawinski, Environmental Education Specialist at CRSD. “Our district has been investing in

innovative ways to ensure the school community is involved with students actively engaged in land stewardship projects."

"What kid doesn't like playing in water? Water holes are around most communities, so learning about freshwater wetlands captures students' curiosity immediately. Probably many of us have childhood experiences of taking home tadpoles and keeping them in a small aquarium or jar. Students want to learn and protect what is in their community or nearby park," said **Tonyea Mead of the Delaware Department of Education**. "Freshwater wetlands are considered among the most biologically diverse of all ecosystems, serving a home to a wide range of plant and animal species. Give students some boots and a net, and they will fall in love with a wetland!"

To this, Senator Hansen says, "Through this project, we hope to educate students and the public on what a freshwater wetland looks like, the interdependent nature of the species that inhabit the wetland, and generate fascination with the beauty and intricacy of this delicate environment."

Several environmental organizations and other like-minded community partners have joined Senator Stephanie Hansen in as cosponsors of the Delaware Freshwater Wetlands Project, including:

- ❖ Delaware Department of Education
- ❖ Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control
- ❖ Caesar Rodney School District
- ❖ Claude E. Phillips Herbarium at Delaware State University
- ❖ State Representative Sophie Phillips
- ❖ Delaware Nature Society
- ❖ Delaware Center for the Inland Bays
- ❖ Brandywine River Restoration Trust
- ❖ Delaware Sierra Club
- ❖ The Nature Conservancy
- ❖ Delaware Wild Lands
- ❖ Plastic Free Delaware
- ❖ Daughters of the American Revolution
- ❖ Ducks Unlimited
- ❖ Amazon

"The Brandywine River Restoration Trust (BRRT) is honored to partner with Senator Hansen on the Freshwater Wetlands Project. Brandywine River's riverine wetlands and wetlands throughout Delaware protect us from flooding, provide clean water, and are critical to climate change. The wetlands deserve protection," said **BRRT Executive Director, Jim Shanahan**.

"Protecting our wetlands is crucial for our native flora and fauna species survival, American Shad spawning and freshwater muscle preservation. We are thrilled to be part of this very important work and excited to offer a riverside cleanup and tour in Brandywine Park as part of this project", said **BRRT Program & Communications Manager, Jenn Parrish**.

"Freshwater wetlands are vital to Delaware," said **TNC PA/DE Executive Director Lori Brennan**. "Wetlands provide wildlife habitats, help protect us from flooding, and serve as a natural filter for pollutants. Thank you to Senator Hansen and the public/private partnership working to build education and appreciation for this important natural resource."

“The National Society of The Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) established the Conservation Committee in 1908 because they realized the importance of our natural resources,” said **Dr. Gloria Lester of the DAR**. “As the population of the world increases, it becomes more and more important to save our natural habitats including the birds, wildlife and plants that may be on the verge of extinction. Let's all work together to make this vision of a healthy environment a reality including preserving the ecosystem of Delaware's Freshwater wetlands.”

To learn more about the Delaware Freshwater Wetlands Project, visit <https://tinyurl.com/wetlandsDE>.

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