



Life Depends On Us

Strategic Plan: 2024-2027

Photo by Hank Davis

www.DelawareNatureSociety.org

Ashland Nature Center | Abbott's Mill Nature Center | Coverdale Farm Preserve | DuPont Environmental Education Center

Overview: Life Depends On Us

At Delaware Nature Society, we believe in the resilience of natural systems. In the face of unprecedented challenges—climate change, loss of healthy natural habitat and biodiversity, and environmental injustices—we choose hope.

Hope springs from 60 years of experience in environmental stewardship and confidence in our affiliation with the National Wildlife Federation, multi-state watershed coalitions, and partners here in Delaware.

This strategic plan celebrates the interconnectedness of humanity and the broader environment. It emphasizes that DelNature's value lies in the integration of conservation, advocacy, and education. Through collaboration with partners and communities across the state, enlightened policies, and greater investments, we can make Delaware a leader and national model for environmental stewardship. Life depends on it.



The three goals of this strategic plan frame our path forward.

Healthy & Resilient

Healthy communities and plentiful natural areas and ecosystems that host and protect diversity, and are resilient to changing conditions.

Informed & Engaged

An environmentally-literate, diverse community of people who understand the challenges and who are engaged in finding and supporting creative solutions to these challenges.

Dynamic & Sustainable

A compelling organization that serves as a model, change agent, and viable source of mutual support for natural areas and communities.

Guiding Principles

Mission

Connecting people and nature to create a healthy environment for all through education, conservation, and advocacy.

Vision

We envision Delaware as a place where people:

- View themselves as part of nature, and understand that nature is essential for life
- Recognize the immediacy of addressing environmental issues
- Take pride and find joy in caring for the natural world

Core Values

We Are Nature

We take care of the places that sustain us. Humans are part of nature, and our fates are interconnected.

Integrity

We are a trusted partner. We act and make decisions driven by our mission and desire for a healthy environment and respect for the science that supports that outcome.

Engagement

We share knowledge, resources, and opportunity so everyone can feel a sense of ownership and share responsibility for causing positive change.

Nature is for All

We collaborate to change practices to enact environmental justice. Inclusive and equitable access to the natural world is not a privilege. It is a basic human right.

Creativity

We thrive when different perspectives are welcomed and new ideas are shared. Innovation will uphold our relevance.



Goal 1: Healthy & Resilient

Delaware Nature Society is an initiator, innovator, and leader in the water, on land, in the classroom, and at the policy table. We were at the formation of the State of Delaware's Natural Areas Program and remain a protector of these Areas. We manage a vibrant collection of preserves and nature centers across the state. This includes a regenerative farm and the nature center at the Russell Peterson Urban Wildlife Refuge, which demonstrate the versatility of environmental education. Our advocacy efforts were instrumental to the creation of Delaware's Clean Water Trust and Coastal Zone Act, which we continue to monitor and defend.

We are united in the pursuit of healthy and plentiful ecosystems and communities that host diversity and are resilient to changing conditions.

What we will Measure:

- Level/extent of protection of Delaware's Natural Areas
- Acres and impacts of sites and lands managed
- Water quality and access
- Use and awareness of native plants and habitats



Objectives		Major Initiatives	
1.1	To protect and restore land, soil, water, plants, and wildlife	1.1.1	Building relationships with those who have influence over land and water to increase protection, restoration, and open space, with a focus on Natural Areas and connections
		1.1.2	Partnering with government agencies and legislators to ensure that the environment is central to local and state policy
		1.1.3	Supporting educational and other systems in enhancing their policy, practice, and capacity for and access to high quality outdoor experiences
1.2	To model environmentally healthy practices and stewardship	1.2.1	Utilizing sites and nature centers to their full capacity as living examples of core values and sound environmental practices
		1.2.2	Caring for preserves and natural areas in ways that cultivate the healthiest possible systems for plants, insects, wildlife, people, food, and learning
		1.2.3	Sharing our work to promote best and emerging practices like regenerative agriculture and food justice, and building a community and body of knowledge for advancing them
1.3	To encourage people in understanding their space in relation to the big picture and to make change within their reach	1.3.1	Promoting backyard habitats, outdoor urban spaces, community gardens, and natural corridors through outreach, programming and technical assistance
		1.3.2	Supporting people in being well-equipped for civic engagement in environmental issues and communities in navigating zoning and other municipal processes
		1.3.3	Sharing stories of and the historical context of environmental issues to increase agency and ambassadorship, reduce climate anxiety, and spark informed action

Goal 2: Informed & Engaged

Delaware Nature Society's programs are well-regarded for being high-quality, hands-on experiences where people can immerse themselves in learning. Childhood experiences as a summer camper or Knee-High naturalist lead to lifelong affinity. A heritage of intergenerational care for nature informs and inspires us as we seek to provide more and deeper opportunities for environmental literacy, outreach, and engagement across the state. To advance environmental justice, we are strengthening our support for communities to prevent, mitigate, and avoid negative impacts of climate change and unequal environmental policies and practices.

We are united in pursuit of an environmentally literate, diverse community of people who understand the environmental challenges and who are engaged in finding and supporting creative solutions to these challenges.

What we will Measure:

- Membership, program and advocacy participation
- Growth of partnerships (deep and wide)
- Engagement in community science and stewardship



Objectives		Major Initiatives	
2.1	To meet people where they are	2.1.1	Employing a ladder of engagement that reflects a varied and developmentally appropriate activities and facilitates continued and progressive learning
		2.1.2	Embedding environmental literacy in school—and community-based partnerships using tools designed to increase agency and an environmental ethic
		2.1.3	Enhancing statewide presence to more fully activate our membership and increase the engagement of new and growing populations.
2.2	To activate the next generation of environmental stewards, caretakers, and advocates	2.2.1	Deepening membership engagement and fostering nature-focused cohorts that celebrate a variety of perspectives and experiences
		2.2.2	Introducing people to the links between environmental issues and health outcomes
		2.2.3	Partnering to advance nature-related job opportunities and career pathways
2.3	To increase accessibility to and positive impacts of nature—for all	2.3.1	Creating more accessible and affordable opportunities for people to connect with nature through coalitions and community partnerships
		2.3.2	Increasing the clarity and interactivity of displays, materials, experiences, and take-home projects for a variety of audiences
		2.3.3	Partnering with policymakers to implement environmental solutions that consider cumulative impacts and disproportionate burdens

Goal 3: Dynamic & Sustainable

Delaware Nature Society has strong partnerships and affiliations at the local, state, and national level. Our credibility was established by dedicated staff members and volunteers who committed their talents to advancing our mission through conservation, advocacy, and education.

We are eager to position the organization for continued relevance as a leader, sought-after partner, and initiator of new approaches. This calls for heightened attention to both internal culture and infrastructure as well as building DelNature's brand and external profile to increase engagement and generate new revenue.

We are united in pursuit of a compelling organization that serves as a model, change agent, and viable source of mutual support for natural areas and communities.

What we will Measure:

- Staff diversity, engagement, and satisfaction
- Board diversity and co-stewardship of the strategic plan
- Organizational visibility and profile
- Fiscal health and financial growth



Objectives		Major Initiatives	
3.1	To sustain a healthy and inclusive workplace that cares for and inspires staff and volunteers	3.1.1	Investing in leadership development, professional development, career growth, and equitable policies and practices to support staff and volunteers
		3.1.2	Designing workplans to reflect core values and to allow staff the time and space to assess progress, refine strategy, and shed low-impact activities
		3.1.3	Establishing internal communication structures and processes to facilitate a relationship-based and cohesive culture
3.2	To build the Board's capacity to ensure organizational health and financial sustainability	3.2.1	Utilizing multi-year, rolling operating and capital budgets that are aligned with strategic objectives and organizational values, and are informed by multi-year facilities, conservation, and program planning
		3.2.2	Listening to the perspectives of various stakeholders to understand opportunities for increased relevance and deeper impact
		3.2.3	Enhancing board and committee functioning through reflection and evolution of board member engagement and decision-making practices
3.3	To generate and focus organizational resources	3.3.1	Establishing systems to collect and analyze data to facilitate structured planning and processes across departments
		3.3.2	Sharpening organizational identity, brand, and public profile to engage new members, volunteers, and program participants as well as attract new revenue sources
		3.3.3	Allocating financial resources to advance staff creativity and fuel innovation

New ways to think about our work

In preparing this strategic plan and listening to our stakeholders we have come to understand that people don't all use or interpret some common terms in the same way. This may be especially true after 60 years of change to the organization and communities we serve. The list below is of key words that came up during the strategic planning process and likely represents a small fraction of the many perspectives we all have. It is included here to make clear that no terms are used in malice, and we welcome all perspectives.

It is of the utmost importance to us that all peoples and communities feel welcomed by DelNature.

Nature And Outdoors

We use "nature" to describe the natural environment and the outdoors. We recognize that not everyone feels the outdoors is theirs to enjoy. We exist to connect everyone to nature, to show that nature exists wherever we are, and to teach that our actions at home can affect the health of the environment.

Man-Made And Natural Boundaries

We respect the people who lived on this land long before governments drew boundaries between states and towns. Nature transcends those boundaries. We are proud to be based in Delaware, doing mighty work in a small state, and we work beyond state lines with communities to protect watersheds and natural corridors across the region.



Conservation

We recognize the word "conservation" can be in reference to a historic American movement that benefited some groups to the great detriment of others. We use conservation to describe protection, restoration and care of land and natural features such as forests and rivers for the benefit of everyone.

Membership

We welcome and encourage all people to participate in our programs and activities in whatever ways are meaningful to them. Our membership program does not exist to exclude anyone, it only assists us in serving everyone. We value the range of contributions from everyone who engages with Delaware Nature Society.

Implementation

Implementation is grounded in a continuous cycle of reflection, learning, action, assessment, and adjustment.

60th Anniversary Themes

To celebrate DelNature's 60th Anniversary and build strong connection points between people and the broader natural world, we have identified the following themes as important and urgent. Throughout implementation of the strategic plan, we will continue to utilize and build on themes that are relevant to and resonate with communities across the state.

Grow With It

Biodiversity is nature's recipe for success, and the small state of Delaware hosts a remarkable diversity of plants, animals and ecosystems. No one organization has done more than DelNature to explore, protect and enhance the diversity of life in Delaware, from planting to publications. But with a growing population and a changing climate we need to work harder and smarter to sustain biodiversity.

Water is Life

Whether exploring another planet or the best place to pitch a tent, we look for water because we know it means life. Nothing is more critical to our way of life in Delaware—we treasure our beaches, rivers and bays. But we haven't always been great at protecting them from pollution. Thanks to DelNature, policies and investments are turning the tide on pollution. New sources, flooding, and sea level rise, call for more and urgent action.

All Things Winged

No matter where you are in Delaware, the air is alive with wings. Birds, bees, and butterflies capture our imagination and connect us to places at home and faraway. We watch and count them for fun and because they are some of the best indicators of ecosystem health. But we've just started to uncover what they can tell us, and how to create habitat in all kinds of spaces—from boxes to backyards.

Food for Thought

Farmers play a critical role in conservation and Delaware has many of them. Food can sustain us and the earth, depending on how it's grown. Through regenerative agriculture we are learning how to grow food, habitat, clean water, and a more stable climate, all at the same time. But this is new territory and we need more people and partners to teach and learn from us to make an impact.

Back to the Land

It all comes together on the land—biodiversity, water, food, and even things with wings need a place to land. The way we use and care for the land impacts how clean our water is, how nutritious our food is, and the diversity of life that can live here. DelNature wrote the book on Delaware's Natural Areas (literally) and has championed their protection and care. But land is a finite resource and the window for protecting some of our most important natural areas is closing.

A Transparent & Flexible Tool

The strategic plan is an important anchor and flexible tool to focus and refocus energies when needed; either to shift direction or to capitalize on newfound opportunities.

Work Plans

The strategic plan drives the agenda and scope of the full board, board committees, staff departments, and teams. Each group will create annual work plans derived from the strategic plan. At the board level, meetings serve as key touchpoints for generative discussions and ongoing assessment of strategic focus.

We will claim time, annually, for a comprehensive review of the plan in light of any changes in our internal and external landscapes. This review will inform refreshed priorities as warranted and assist us in determining when to embark upon a new planning process.

Fiscal Planning

As an accompaniment to this plan, multi-year operating and capital budgets project sources and uses of funds for the life of the strategic plan. Some initiatives are contingent upon having the financial and human resources in place for planning and execution, and will be launched accordingly.

Accountability

Measures have been identified for each goal in order to focus work plans, assessment, and realignment as the plan unfolds. Both qualitative and quantitative measures are important to illustrating a holistic picture of progress toward the goals, including the scale of outputs and the depth of outcomes.

Board Oversight

As the board monitors progress toward goals, it relies on the good judgment and experience of the Executive Director and the entire the staff to design programs and processes to achieve the goals.

Dashboard

Staff leads maintain an organizational dashboard—also an accompaniment to this plan—as a tool for presenting progress toward the goals for the board and full staff. In addition, every department has a host of more detailed indicators, tracking the momentum of individual and departmental work plans.

Commitment to DEIJ

Building a culture of workplace inclusivity and enacting environmental justice are priorities. Diversity, Equity, Inclusivity & Justice themes are infused within every goal of the strategic plan are implemented through major initiatives. A staff work group and a board committee are champions for DEIJ, working collaboratively with the rest of the staff and board to embody equitable practices and live out the core values.

