



# DELAWARE WILD LANDS NEWS

## Update

DECEMBER 01, 2006

**DELAWARE WILD LANDS, INC.**  
315 Main Street  
PO Box 505  
Odessa, DE 19730-0505  
Telephone: 302-378-2736  
Facsimile: 302-378-3629

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### STAFF

PETER MARTIN  
*Field Ecologist & Manager of  
Sussex/Kent County Operations*

RON HAAS  
*Project Manager*

DEBORAH TURNER  
*Administrative Assistant*

JACK DUKES  
*Land and Farm Manager*

## DWL MAKES MAJOR ACQUISITION

On March 15, 2006 final settlement was held for the acquisition of the Sharp Farm, a lovely 431 acre combination of old growth forest, tidal salt marsh and tillable upland located along Route 13 and Route 1 just north of Odessa. Bordering Old Drawyer's Creek and Appoquinimink River it is ideally suited for development as a waterfowl refuge which will be its use.

This farm was the only farm along Route 13 between St. Georges and Odessa not sold for development and its protection was critical. The preservation of this parcel was the result of a unique cooperative effort between The Conservation Fund, Mt. Cuba Center for Horticulture and Delaware Wild Lands, Inc. and the Sharp family whose philanthropic generosity made it possible.

Initially Blaine Phillips, Jr. of The Conservation Fund approached the Sharp family, owners of the property, about selling it for conservation. Knowing of Delaware Wild Lands, Inc.'s similar interest, Mr. Phillips contacted our office asking us to partner in the project.

For about a year Mr. Phillips worked with the Sharps developing ideas and negotiating the price. The

Sharps agreed to sell the farm for conservation for the price of \$7.5 million, about half of its development value. In the meantime, Delaware Wild Lands, Inc. agreed to put up \$3.75 million of the funds and the Sharps entered into a contract to sell to The Conservation Fund at the \$7.5 million price. The Fund raised \$1.75 million from Mt. Cuba Center and negotiated a \$2 million conservation easement with the State of Delaware. The Fund settled with the Sharp Family for the \$7.5 million and subsequently with Delaware Wild Lands for \$3.75 million making Delaware Wild Lands the titleholder of the property and we are honored to have that privilege.

We are deeply grateful to The Conservation Fund and Blaine Phillips, Jr. for facilitating this project and negotiating the conservation easement. We are also grateful for Mt. Cuba Center's generosity. However, the Sharp family deserves the bulk of the credit for their generosity in making it happen.

This successful undertaking vividly demonstrates the importance of partnerships if significant conservation efforts are to be successful in the future. Delaware Wild Lands looks forward to working with The Conservation Fund in the future.

## RON HAAS JOINS STAFF

In February, 2006 Ron Haas joined our staff as Project Manager. Ron is very familiar with our Sussex County operations through years of volunteer work on projects within the Great Cypress Swamp and has become an integral part of our forestry, agricultural and deer management activities.

One of Ron's first projects was working with Jeff Kolodzinski, a graduate student from the University of Georgia. Jeff is utilizing our Great Cypress Swamp property as part of his research that was designed to track the movement patterns of adult female deer. The research involved the rocket net trapping as well as free darting of target deer. Captured bucks were given easily identifiable white ear tags and mature does received yellow ear tags and a GPS collar with a telemetry transmitter.

At the end of the study in late spring or summer of 2007, the does will be located and the collars will be released by a radio transmitted signal. The collars store GPS tracking data which will be analyzed to show what habitat types were used by the does throughout the year.

As part of the research project, Ron designed a special mounting system for the rocket net deployments, identified the best sites for net set up, and helped in the tagging and collaring operations. Ron became very proficient in the use of the dart gun used to immobilize deer and will be working with Jeff through the winter and spring to monitor telemetry signals from the deer.

Ron has also been active in our restoration efforts for Atlantic White Cedar present in

the Great Cypress Swamp. Historically, Atlantic White Cedar was more abundant than Bald cypress, but is now restricted to numerous isolated sites scattered throughout the swamp. Ron has been identifying these sites and recording GPS locations on our forestry management map. Many of these White Cedar trees are being crowded out by the rapidly growing sweet gum and maple trees. We have initiated a program to release the White Cedar by killing adjacent competitive trees through the application of concentrated Glyphosate to frill cuts. This is a slow and labor intensive process, but initial results show much promise.

Ron is the father of two children. Jessica is a freshman in college, and Ryan is in tenth grade.



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## SUSTAINABLE FORESTRY PLAN INITIATED

The large flatbed trucks with rather unusual looking equipment arrived at 7 AM on the 24th of July. The sign on the truck door identified the source: MAR-HAN Harvesting LLC of Westover, Maryland. This was the long awaited start of our Sustainable Forest Management Plan. Delaware Wild Lands has long considered a forestry plan that would include limited timber harvesting, but would also incorporate elements of habitat restoration, wildlife management and biodiversity enhancement. The development of this plan required 10 months of in depth site analysis utilizing historical data, field work and the latest computer technologies. We contracted Vision Forestry, LLC to develop the plan, and have now contracted them for plan implementation. We are pleased to say that Delaware Wild Lands will be first in the State of Delaware to conduct sustainable forestry operations certified by both the Forest Stewardship Council and the Sustainable Forestry Initiative guidelines.

Our initial 2006 project proposals were for two limited demonstration harvest projects and one thinning operation. The first project was 52 acres designed to demonstrate four different harvest types: standard thinning; 50 to 60% harvest; 80% harvest and an eight acre clear-cut. In the sections of partial cutting, we retained un-cut "habitat islands" of various sizes. As far as we know, this is the first timber harvest operation that was designed to incorporate the use of such "islands" for biodiversity purposes. Unfortunately the saw mill that could best handle our large timber suffered major financial difficulties and had to halt operations. This closed down market opportunities for all Eastern Shore timber operations. We were able to complete the 52-acre harvest, but not able to start the other projects. We are hopeful that this mill, located in Sharptown, MD, will again re-open and facilitate our future harvest activities.

The numerous visitors to the harvest site have all been surprised at the cleanliness of the operation. The specialized harvest equipment enabled very selective tree cutting as well as extremely low impact on the forest soils. This was truly a "low impact" timber harvest. We have been so impressed by this equipment and the operators that we will continue to request MAR-HAN for future harvests.

Some of the site visitors have included: Delaware Secretary of Agriculture Michael Scuse with State Forester Austin Short, Evan Rehm of the Delaware Watershed Assessment Section of DNREC, Rob Line, Tim Kaden, and Chris Bennett of State Parks and Recreation and Representatives of the Virginia Nature Conservancy. Additional visits are planned by Karen Bennett of the Delaware Heritage Program and Kirk Mantay, the regional biologist for Ducks Unlimited. Thus far all have been impressed with the operation and are looking for additional applications of our techniques on other lands. The Delaware Wild Lands sustainable forestry operation has been praised by the Governor's Council on Forestry for "undertaking the challenge of developing a sustainable forest management plan for your Cypress Swamp property."

We have developed specific project plans and goals for 2007 and are developing plans for projects beyond 2007. All profits from the timber sales will be re-invested in restoration projects, habitat enhancement projects, as well as re-planting and property maintenance activities.

## KENT/SUSSEX UPDATE

by Field Ecologist Pete Martin

### Deer Management Program Expanded

Delaware Wild Lands has been the private lands leader in deer herd management for the past 15 years. We have found that the high deer population levels have had deleterious effects on natural vegetation regeneration as well as on any restoration plantings that we attempt. Indeed, it seems that the only food that deer like better than Atlantic White Cedar, Bald cypress, and oak seedlings are soybeans! Our goal has not changed over the years and we will continue to aggressively manage to reduce deer numbers to levels that are in balance with the habitat.

The State of Delaware has been supportive of progressive deer management including the methodology and goals of Quality Deer Management. The State's new Game and Mammal Biologist, Joe Rogerson, has implemented new management programs including the Severe Deer Damage Assistance Program that target areas where the deer population is excessive. This program has allowed us to utilize as many additional doe harvest days as needed to maintain high doe harvest levels. It puts the burden of management on hunters and land owners by requiring the selective harvest of does while restricting the harvest of young bucks. The extra effort has rewarded our hunters with the potential of harvesting mature quality bucks. When we first started Quality Deer Management the average harvested buck was 1½ years of age with limited antler development. Current average harvest age is 3½, and we are harvesting bucks as old as 6½ years. Antler development is now a minimum of 8 points and spread of over 15 inches. We have been most aggressive in our management on our Milford Neck and Great Cypress Swamp properties, but have expanded this management to all of our properties including our most recent acquisitions.

In addition to our Quality Deer Management Program we are working with the development of deer buffer strip and diversion strip plantings on three of our agricultural fields in the Great Cypress Swamp. We have taken sections out of normal crop rotation and planted them with other vegetation such as grass, clover, chicory, brassicas, oats, and high value native vegetation. We then monitor deer foraging activities on these strips and the adjacent crops to measure any reduction of crop damage. The State Department of Agriculture and State Fish and Wildlife are encouraging these activities through a cost share program.