

Delaware River Watershed Conservation Collaborative Mission and Vision

Executive Summary

This document describes the organizational governance system for the Delaware River Watershed Conservation Collaborative (DRWCC), a partnership established to identify shared priorities and goals among stakeholders in the watershed, and to accelerate conservation to achieve those goals together.

The Collaborative builds upon years of conservation momentum in the watershed driven by community members, businesses, recreational interest groups, conservation organizations, and local, state, interstate and federal government agencies.

By formalizing our collaborative relationship, we will maximize our collective impact by enhancing and leveraging capacity and resources. In collaborative relationships, people begin to see each other as partners rather than competitors. This shift in view is profound, and is one of the most potent ways to achieve impactful landscape-scale conservation.

An organizational governance system outlines the agreed-upon decision-making processes, accountability and control measures, and expectations for participation that are necessary for accomplishing organizational objectives. The Collaborative has created this governance structure to aid our partners and stakeholders in understanding the needs, roles, shared objectives and communal values that will drive our collaboration, and help us work effectively toward mutually beneficial conservation gains in the Delaware River watershed.

This document and the accompanying by-laws will focus on select aspects of organizational governance including structure; roles and responsibilities; authorities; decision making; communications; and transparency. These documents are dynamic and evolving, and the Collaborative will have the opportunity to edit and update this framework over time to ensure it is current, adaptive, and representative.

Introduction

Flowing from the Catskill Mountains to the Atlantic Ocean, the Delaware River, with its 2,000 tributaries, is the heart of the four-state region comprising parts of New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware. Cities, towns, farms, forests, mountains, marshes, beaches, and more, are all connected by the longest undammed river east of the Mississippi.

The Delaware River watershed is a national treasure of cultural, environmental, ecological, and economic importance. It is home to more than 8 million people who depend on the watershed, with its rich natural resources, as an economic engine, a place of recreation, and a source of clean water. The watershed provides drinking water to more than 13 million people, including New York City and Philadelphia.

The watershed also provides habitat for more than 200 resident and migrant fish species, hosting significant recreational fisheries, is an important commercial source of eastern oyster and blue crab, and boasts the world's largest spawning population of the American horseshoe crab, a species with enormous ecological, biomedical and economic value. Linked to the seasonal spawning of horseshoe crabs is the second largest concentration of shorebirds in North America, contributing to the designation of the Delaware Bay as one of the four most important shorebird migration sites in the world.

The Delaware River watershed is defined by the diversity of its landscape and communities. It encompasses some of the most densely populated areas in the nation, yet remains 50 percent forested. Conserving and restoring its waters and other natural resource values for future generations of people and wildlife requires a shared commitment to work together more closely today than ever before.

The **DRWCC** will foster collaborative action to advance conservation and restoration within the Delaware River watershed in four strategic areas:

1. Conserving and restoring fish and wildlife habitat
2. Improving and sustaining water quality
3. Upgrading water management, and reducing flood damage
4. Enhancing recreational opportunities and public access

The Collaborative will work with regional coalitions, metropolitan planning organizations, government agencies', restoration partnerships and conservation networks to support investments in clean water, recreational access, community resilience, and the conservation of high-quality habitat to meet the needs of people and wildlife in the watershed.

Need for the Collaborative

PUBLIC LAW 114–322 subtitle E. Delaware River Basin Conservation section 3500 established the Delaware River Basin Restoration Program, therein providing an avenue for appropriations to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to create a technical assistance program to identify, prioritize, and implement meaningful and coordinated conservation in the Delaware River watershed. The Law requires the Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to “coordinate” with federal, state, local and regional entities and conservation partners in order to plan and implement conservation strategies in the Basin.

In the spirit of coordination, and in response to growing recognition of the need for collaborative conservation and restoration in the watershed, the governors of the watershed states issued a public proclamation (May 16, 2019) in which they “commit(ed) to and recognize(ed) the advantages of working together to make the Delaware River Basin the national model for sustainable economic development, drinkable clean water, healthy fish and wildlife populations, outdoor recreation, and nature-based climate resilience by restoring the Basin's world-class natural resources through

partnerships that encompass government agencies, non-governmental organizations, private entities, and other interested parties from across the Delaware River Basin.

In response, the Service, the Delaware River watershed states, and other agencies and partner organizations worked collectively to establish the Delaware River Watershed Conservation Collaborative. The work of the Collaborative will focus on conservation action, strategically conceived and undertaken to achieve conservation outcomes of mutual benefit, by organizing, aligning and connecting on-the-ground work to accomplish shared goals for the entirety of the watershed and its people.

To support this on-the-ground conservation priority work, the U.S Fish & Wildlife Service, in cooperation with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, created the Delaware Watershed Conservation Fund (DWCF), which provides competitive matching grants to stakeholders to coordinate restoration and protection activities that achieve the goals the program.

Provided that federal funds continue to be appropriated to support the DWCF, the Collaborative will establish priorities for, and provide guidance on, the operation of the DWCF in order to achieve goals and objectives of the Act and fulfill a watershed-wide conservation strategy. A Steering Committee will assist in setting funding priorities to ensure that conservation investments are reflective of the DRWCC priorities, and contribute to landscape scale conservation gains.

Expanding our horizons

The DWCF is one of several methods available to the Collaborative to achieve mutual landscape-level conservation goals in the Delaware River watershed. Proposals coming into the DWCF have provided insight into the magnitude of challenges facing conservation efforts within the watershed, illustrating the need for coordinated and collaborative action on a much larger scale.

Conservation outcomes are fundamentally tied to processes such as the movement of water across a watershed or river basin, or the annual migrations of fish and wildlife species—that occur on a relatively large ecosystem - or landscape - scale. Achieving results on this scale, in a complex landscape with diverse government, private, and community actors, can only happen through collaboration.

Collaborative partners are motivated to make progress toward addressing broader needs that will ensure our collective success, including:

- Building momentum for collaborative conservation in the watershed by supporting partners through federally appropriated funding for projects in four key areas: clean water, habitat, recreation, and flow management.
- Supporting watershed communities and organizations to work across jurisdictional boundaries to create more resilient coastal and terrestrial habitats in order to adapt to changing conditions in the watershed, with a focus on those attributable to anthropogenic climate change.
- Expanding awareness of important conservation concepts and messages among citizens and communities in the watershed, with a focus on including and elevating voices of diverse and underrepresented communities.
- Equally, inclusively and justly supporting and engaging all watershed residents in actions of environmental stewardship that reflect the needs of their communities.

Addressing Threats and Barriers

There are multiple stressors that threaten the health and wellbeing of the Delaware River Watershed. In response to these stressors, the Collaborative will focus its efforts on the following priorities:

- **Racial and Social Inequity** – We will strive to increase diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice in all elements of our work and with our partners to ensure all communities, particularly marginalized communities of color, share equitably in the benefits of increased public access and improved water quality.
- **Global Climate Change** – We will work to maximize nature’s role in helping vulnerable populations adapt to present and future landscape conditions impacted by changing climate.
- **Pollution** – We will promote mechanisms to prevent pollution sources and stimulate restoration and enhancement of stream and wetland functions to enhance resiliency and reduce pollution in the Delaware River watershed.
- **Habitat Fragmentation** – We will seek to protect high-quality wildlife habitats (terrestrial and aquatic) throughout the watershed while working to improve connectedness, and to enhance and restore degraded habitat areas, to benefit at-risk and priority fish and wildlife species.
- **Non-Native Invasive Species**- We will encourage efforts that prevent the introduction of, and manage the impact of, invasive species on the watershed’s ecosystems.
- **Flooding** –We will support programs to identify regional, countywide, and municipal mitigation actions that can reduce future flood losses in the Delaware River watershed.

Collaborative Framework Approach

Organizing, aligning and connecting our work is imperative to restore and protect the watershed as envisioned by the Delaware River Watershed Conservation Act, along with preserving its ecological, environmental, recreational and economic well-being for future generations. The Collaborative will frame its work through a set of shared priorities and values. The following framework serves as a guide for focusing and aligning efforts, both within our respective organizations, and across the networks of partners collaborating to conserve and restore the health and vitality of the watershed.

The Collaborative shares both the responsibility and the opportunity to lead and facilitate work that prioritizes and informs conservation and restoration investments and actions in the 13,000- square mile Delaware River Watershed. We are a partnership that develops and implements collaborative strategies that will achieve watershed-scale conservation and restoration benefits across geopolitical boundaries, and shares expertise and resources.

Collaborative conservation and restoration effort in the Delaware River watershed region establishes and nurtures:

- Leadership by organizations and agencies at all levels in pursuing innovative approaches to habitat conservation, water quality/management, outdoor recreation, and landscape recognition;
- Mutual efforts to address multiple values of the watershed’s natural, cultural, historical, economic and recreational wealth;
- Willingness and commitment to collaborate across jurisdictions, both within specific geographic areas and throughout the Delaware River watershed as a whole;

- Engagement by citizens, landowners and stakeholders who are dedicated to diverse, equitable, inclusive, just, and sustained strategic conservation and restoration action; and,
- Connected, scalable, and strategic conservation and restoration actions, in an adaptive management context.
- Effective communication and coordination amongst both new and established partnership endeavors in order to amplify our collective conservation impact.

Vision

Our vision is of a Delaware River watershed where a vast, diverse and interconnected network of healthy lands and waters support and improve our life sustaining water resources, habitat for abundant fish and wildlife, and safe access to enjoy outdoor recreation, for the benefit of all people, now and for generations to come.

Mission

Our mission is to inspire, coordinate and actively support watershed-wide collaborative and strategic actions by partners and stakeholders throughout the Delaware River watershed, to achieve agreed upon conservation, restoration and public outdoor-recreation access outcomes.

Shared Principles

Below are shared principles of the Collaborative that underscore each member organization's beliefs and commitment to conservation in the Delaware River watershed. The Collaborative is committed to honoring and fostering:

- **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion:** The Collaborative is dedicated to meaningful engagement with all communities and addressing diversity, equity, and inclusion within our structure, partnerships, goals, and actions to ensure that all communities share equitably in the benefits the Delaware River watershed provides.
- **Transparency:** Members of the Collaborative and our partners will come together in a way that promotes accountability and trust to achieve progress toward shared goals.
- **Collaboration:** Each member organization of the Collaborative will work to support our collective priorities and the priorities of one another whenever possible and practical.
- **Outcome-oriented:** The Collaborative will monitor and measure results.
- **Science-based:** The Collaborative will use science as the foundation for its decisions.
- **Efficiency:** The Collaborative will ensure that its actions complement and are aligned with those of other member organizations that have shared goals and will maximize those connections, by sharing resources whenever possible and practical.
- **Shared values:** The Collaborative acknowledges that participation by each member organization is valuable, and each member organization should benefit from participation in the Collaborative as well.
- **Shared successes:** Success should lift the standing of each member organization both within the Collaborative and beyond it, while fortifying the Collaborative itself.

