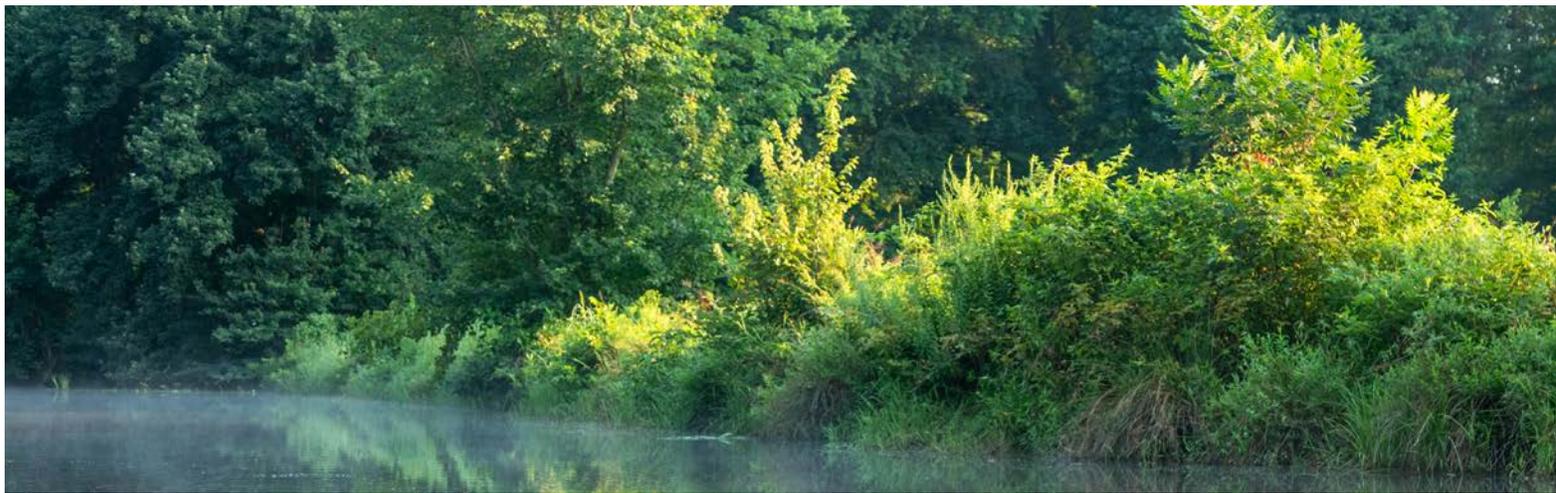


DELAWARE
ANNUAL REPORT
FOREST SERVICE

A YEAR IN REVIEW
Seeing the Forest through the Trees.





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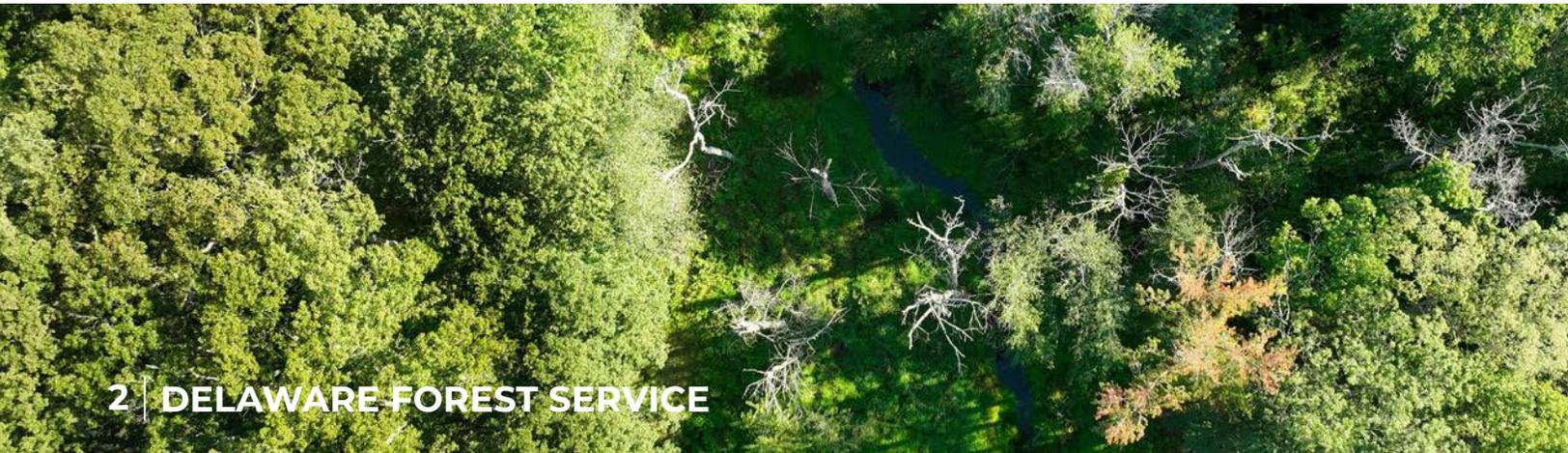
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I hope that this year's Annual Report finds you well and that you have taken the time to explore one of the thousands of acres of forest in Delaware. With 361,000 acres of forest remaining, it is vital to monitor and manage each acre regardless of ownership. The DFS takes the landowner's desired goals and aligns them with actions that lead to optimal forest health, production, value, habitat, and forest resiliency.

In FY25, our five CORE programs: Forest Health, Urban & Community Forestry, Forest Stewardship, Forest Education, and Wildland Fire each offered technical, financial, and educational assistance garnering national recognition for their efforts. Program staff adapted to declining budgets and increased demands to ensure deliverables were met for all Delawareans.

Our State Forests: Blackbird, Taber, and Redden all continued to gain user groups and daily visitors while simultaneously accomplishing our mission to Conserve, Protect, and Enhance, leading to forest resiliency. State forest lands continued to serve as the model for habitat establishment in FY25, and I am particularly proud of

this considering our general fund budget for state forest operations is only \$30,000.

Lastly, our staff continued to be the success story in FY25. They believed in working for our constituents and our lands regardless of the shifts in federal guidance. Whether it was overseeing activities on 361,000 acres of forestland statewide, working on national goals/issues, developing ordinances with governmental agencies, educating the youth, or participating in partnership growth, our staff exemplify what it means to be forestry professionals. They truly care about the long-term outcomes because they believe in a hands-on approach that will lead to forests for Delaware's future, and lands which will still need professional management regardless of size, ownership base, or the end goal.

As you read through this year's annual report, please reach out to discuss ways the Delaware Forest Service can assist you and continue to build our forest resources within the state.

Kyle Hoyd
Delaware State Forester

DELAWARE STATE FORESTS



**PROTECT
THE LAND,
CONSERVE
THE
RESOURCES**

Blackbird State Forest



Taber State Forest

The Delaware Forest Service manages three state forests totaling more than 21,000 acres: Blackbird State Forest near Smyrna, Taber State Forest near Harrington, and Redden State Forest near Georgetown.

Each forest is actively managed with multiple goals in mind: sustainable

timber production, wildlife habitat, demonstration areas for forest management, and public recreation, while providing unique opportunities for residents and visitors to connect with nature.

Through active forest management, we enhance wildlife habitat while also keeping facilities and sites accessible to the public at no cost. Recreational activities

include hiking, biking, horseback riding, and in-season hunting. State forests feature over 90 miles of trails and forest roads across the state, enabling much of the passive recreation. Together, these three state forests highlight the beauty and diversity of Delaware's natural landscapes in a working environment with one goal: maintaining forest health.



as both an operational hub and a friendly gateway for visitors.

Blackbird has become a popular destination for outdoor recreation, offering over 40 miles of multi-use trails for activities like hiking, biking, running, horseback riding, and even cross-country skiing. The forest also features a 2,200-foot paved, accessible nature trail, 16 primitive campsites, and four picnic areas. Loved for both hunting and catch-and-release fishing, Blackbird demonstrates how well-managed forests can offer recreational opportunities while promoting conservation and forest health.

Taber State Forest

Tucked away in the quiet, rural landscape of southwestern Kent

Blackbird State Forest

Delaware's northernmost state forest, Blackbird, spans the border of New Castle and Kent Counties. Just a quick 30-minute drive from Wilmington or Newark, Blackbird's ten tracts cover over 6,000 acres of diverse woodlands, including oaks, hickories, maples, gums, and yellow-poplar. The northern regional office, located on the Tybout Tract, functions



County, Taber State Forest is Delaware's smallest state forest, covering just over 1,300 acres. What it lacks in size, it makes up for with its focus: primarily managed for timber production and wildlife habitat enhancement. Loblolly pine dominates much of the forest, while upland hardwoods add variety to the landscape.

Due to its secluded location and abundant natural habitat, Taber has become a popular hunting spot, attracting sportsmen and women from around the region. Its role in promoting sustainable forestry practices also makes Taber an important real-world classroom for landowners and professionals interested in learning how working forests can benefit both people and wildlife. Its demonstration areas showcase what silviculture can do for forestland owners by allowing them to visit and see different types of timber management and how it creates wildlife habitat.

Redden State Forest

At over 14,000 acres, Redden State Forest in central Sussex County is Delaware's largest State forest. Known for its variety of loblolly pines and mixed hardwoods, including oak, gum, and maple, Redden is a key part of southern

Delaware's natural heritage. Redden has 44 miles of trails across 18 tracts, making it one of the most popular spots in the state for hiking, horseback riding, cycling, and bird watching. Its extensive size and diverse habitats also make it an ideal location for deer hunting, attracting hunters throughout the season. The southern regional office, located on the Headquarters

Forests represent the heart of Delaware's public woodlands and forestlands. They provide space for recreation, education, conservation, and forestry operations, while demonstrating how well-managed forests can balance the needs of people, wildlife, and the wood products industry. By actively managing these forests, they have created healthy, uneven-aged forests that



Tract, supports forestry operations and features an education center, a restored historic carriage house that has been serving students and community visitors since 2000. Additionally, Redden offers 18 primitive campsites and a small fishing pond, enhancing its appeal for outdoor recreation and education and attracting those seeking adventure and learning in nature.

Together, Blackbird, Taber, and Redden State

sequester carbon, provide fiber for wood products, and are at optimal health, thereby supporting our local and regional economies.

Top Left: Blackbird State Forest Headquarters Tract.

Bottom Left: Catch-and-release Fishing.

Right: Recreational Horseback Riding.

Dover Office:
(302)698-4500
Blackbird Office:
(302)653-6505
Redden Office:
(302)856-2893

FOREST EDUCATION

In Fiscal Year 2025, the Delaware Forest Service (DFS) Education Program reached 17,522 Delawareans through schools, libraries, competitions, community programs, and outreach events. From Smokey Bear's 80th Birthday Celebration to hands-on forestry training for high school students, DFS education efforts continue to cultivate environmental literacy and inspire stewardship in residents of all ages.

Elementary School Education

DFS reached 12,080 students across 117 public and private elementary schools. Through classroom visits, contests, and library programming, students learned about trees, wildfire prevention, and the importance of conservation.

Arbor Day Poster Contest

The 2025 theme, *Trees Are Terrific...and Color Our World*, inspired creativity among 6,949 K-5 students from 57 schools. Through this event, 3,300 students

received free loblolly pine seedlings.

Twelve statewide winners were honored at the Delaware Arbor Day Ceremony on May 2, 2025, at the Blackbird Forest Education Center.

Environmental Science

DFS continues to play a vital role in preparing students for careers in natural resources through competitions and experiential learning. In FY25, 229 students participated in five forestry and environmental science events.

Delaware FFA Forestry CDE

On June 17, 2025, six middle school and three high school chapters competed in the Delaware FFA Forestry Career Development Event (CDE) at Brecknock Park. This event tested their skills in tree identification, compass and pacing, and board foot calculations.

The Odessa High FFA Chapter earned first place and will represent Delaware at the National

FFA Convention, held in Indianapolis, Indiana in October 2025.

Science Olympiad

DFS staff supervised a life science event across three statewide competitions:

- March 1, 2025 – High School (45 students)
- March 15, 2025 – Middle School (22 students)
- April 12, 2025 – Elementary (16 students)

Delaware Envirothon

DFS has been a proud partner since the program's founding in 1996. In FY25, DFS elevated its leadership as the rotating fifth topic was "Forest Resiliency: The Natural Climate Solution."

- October 2024: Hosted a hands-on forestry training
- February 2025: Hosted a specialized 5th Topic training with industry experts.
- April 10, 2025: DFS hosted the statewide Envirothon competition at Blackbird Forest Education Center, welcoming 22 teams and 100+ volunteers.

Adult Education and Community Engagement

DFS recognizes the importance of lifelong learning. In FY25, staff provided:

- 7 adult programs for 172 participants, covering topics from Smokey Bear to the history of winter twig identification.
- 31 community outreach events, reaching 4,215 attendees with exhibits, presentations, and trainings.
- 5 group tours at the Blackbird Forest Education Center with 143 visitors experiencing Delaware's forests first-hand.



Top: Educator, Ashley Melvin, showing an emperor moth in a local program, designed to educate youth

Middle: Participants listen to an indoor presentation at the Master Gardener Training.

Bottom: Delaware student tries on Wildland Fire gear at a 9-1-1 Emergency Preparedness Day event.





*Lake Forest East Elementary
Students viewing forest
education materials.*

Challenges of FY25

While Fiscal Year 2025 was filled with exciting milestones, it also brought challenges that tested our team's capacity and creativity.

With one Education Specialist on staff, the demand for programs often outpaced availability. We also wrestled with how to balance the depth of our programs with the need to reach schools and communities across the entire state so

we can tell the story of the science behind forestry and how it drives sustainability. Sometimes that meant making tough choices, whether to serve a new area or return to a school that has come to rely on us year after year.

The most pressing challenge was ensuring that every child, no matter where they live, has the same opportunity to learn about Delaware's forests and what they provide. Reaching all of Delaware's schools and communities will remain a challenge, but it remains one of our strongest

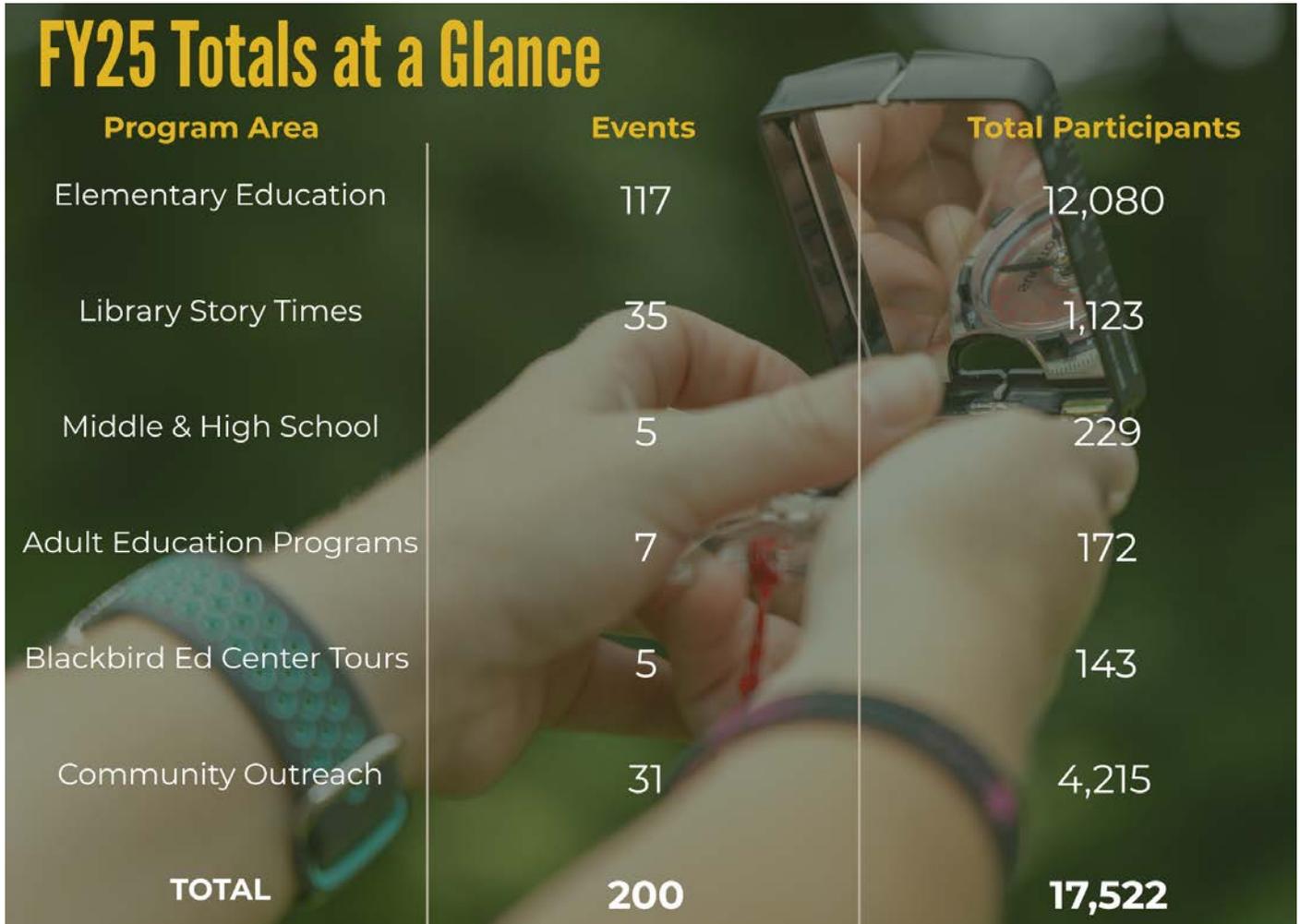
commitments as we grow.

Looking ahead, these challenges have helped shape our goals for Fiscal Year 2026, in which we aim to expand our reach, strengthen our partnerships, and ensure that more Delawareans than ever can benefit from forest education.

Goals for FY26

The lessons from Fiscal Year 2025 have guided us in setting clear, forward-focusing goals for the year ahead. In FY26, we hope to expand our reach even

FY25 Totals at a Glance



Program Area	Events	Total Participants
Elementary Education	117	12,080
Library Story Times	35	1,123
Middle & High School	5	229
Adult Education Programs	7	172
Blackbird Ed Center Tours	5	143
Community Outreach	31	4,215
TOTAL	200	17,522

further, with a particular focus on bringing our programs to more schools. We aim to engage at least 65% of elementary schools statewide while only having one position in the forest service to do so.

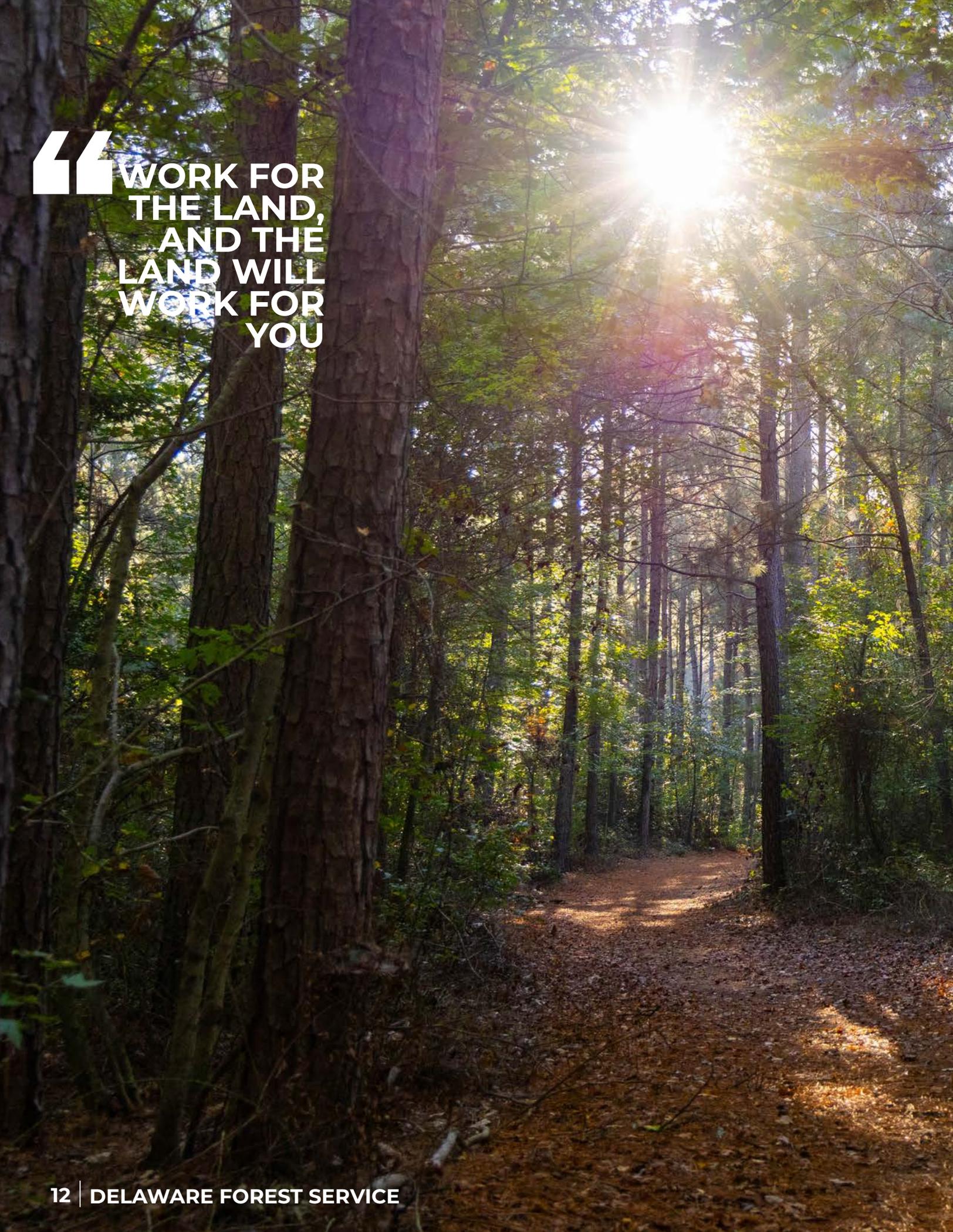
We also plan to build on the success of our secondary education efforts by creating new forestry and climate resilience modules that prepare middle and high school students for future careers in conservation.

For adults and community members, we are committed to offering more learning opportunities and deepening partnerships with libraries,

nonprofits, and local organizations.

Finally, we want to strengthen how we measure impact, ensuring that we not only reach more people but also leave them with meaningful knowledge and tools to care for Delaware’s forests. To achieve these goals, additional support through general fund increases will be essential, enabling DFS to expand capacity and bring the benefits of forestry education to more Delawareans.

To learn more about the Forest Education Program, contact (302)698-4551 or visit de.gov/forestry.

A photograph of a forest path. The path is covered in fallen leaves and leads into a dense forest of tall, thin trees. Sunlight filters through the canopy, creating a bright, hazy glow in the upper right corner. The text "WORK FOR THE LAND, AND THE LAND WILL WORK FOR YOU" is overlaid in white, bold, sans-serif font on the left side of the image, preceded by a large white quotation mark.

**“WORK FOR
THE LAND,
AND THE
LAND WILL
WORK FOR
YOU**



ACTIVE MANAGEMENT

The Forest Service is uniquely positioned to manage Delaware's Forest Resources through active engagement with landowners, homeowners associations, municipalities, and county agencies. We do this by providing technical, educational, and financial assistance to help with the understanding and management of our states forest resources. The DFS is home to subject matter experts in youth and adult forest education, urban forestry, forest stewardship, forest health, wildfire, and public land management. This gives our agency the ability to manage on the tree-by-tree basis and forest level making for a 360 degree approach.

Our management approach is simple: provide care for your resources and

they will provide. Forest resources offer shade, improved air quality, forest products, carbon storage, and much more. Actively managing your resources cuts down on the negative effects and measures, if a forest health outbreak incident occurs. Management also decreases reactionary measures because your forest stand is better suited to ward off forest health threats such as exotic insects, invasive species, and devastating wildfires. Our communities benefit from our active management as we strive towards tree canopy goals, ordinance development for tree protection, and implement tree care practices to maximize the benefits our urban resources provide.

Redden State Forest

FOREST HEALTH PROGRAM

Delaware's forests are living systems that require ongoing care and monitoring. The Delaware Forest Service's Forest Health Program plays a vital role in tracking insect and disease threats, evaluating storm- and flood-related damage, and providing technical assistance to landowners and communities. FY25 was a year that balanced promoting healthy growing conditions with the continued spread of invasive-exotic pests and diseases.

Insects and Diseases

A mild summer with consistent rainfall through late August provided trees across the state with strong growing conditions and reduced many of the common native insect and disease pressures. However, the spread of Beech Leaf Disease (BLD), first discovered in Delaware in 2023 at White Clay Creek State Park, remains a serious concern.

In FY25, BLD was

confirmed as far south as the Peters Tract of Blackbird State Forest and parts of western Kent County. DFS continues to monitor the spread using permanent plots established in 2021 to assess the extent to which this disease will affect Delaware's forests.

The Forest Health program conducts aerial surveys of the state annually to monitor forest health threats based on foliage color and forest stand mortality. The annual aerial survey, which is the only one in the state, was performed this year, June 20 through 24, and mapped 35 separate areas of forest damage. The most significant included the ongoing decline in ash caused by the invasive Emerald Ash Borer, as well as impacts from flooding and saltwater intrusion. All the areas identified were later ground-truthed for further confirmation and evaluation.

Additionally, DFS maintains long-term trapping sites and monitoring plots for a wide range of current and

potential threats including Asian Longhorn Beetle, Southern Pine Beetle, Spangly Moth (Gypsy), Walnut Twig Beetle, Bacterial Leaf Scorch, Sirex Wood wasp, Elm Zigzag Sawfly, Laurel Wilt, and White Oak mortality. As a result of FY25 initiatives,



the Forest Health program is able to effectively plan and adapt for upcoming impacts of these emerging and ongoing threats.

Big Trees of Delaware

The Big Trees of Delaware program continued to be a source of pride and outreach in FY25. Staff re-measured the leading competitive trees for the upcoming 6th edition of the Big Trees of Delaware book. New photographs were taken in spring and early summer, with plans to publish the updated edition in FY26 pending funding.

Additionally, the Big Tree Playground web map continues to be updated and linked through the



DFS website, providing residents and visitors with an interactive way to explore Delaware's champion trees. This mapping-based program allows anyone to see and



learn about the beauty of Delaware's largest trees, regardless of their location.

Public Outreach and Engagement

Forest Health staff were active in public education throughout FY25. Highlights included a Forest Health display at the Delaware State Fair's DDA Building on July 26, and outreach to first through fourth graders at South Dover's Career Day,

where children learned about tree health and forestry careers.

*Left: Sample Collection
Top Right: Barkbeetle trap collection
Bottom Right: Aerial Survey*

The Forest Health team responded to nearly 90 requests for technical assistance and carried out 27 field visits to help citizens diagnose issues caused by insects, diseases, or storms on their trees and woodlots.



Issues and Needs for FY26

The forest health program operates with one full-time staff member and a \$83,000 federal budget allocation.

to this program through program support will be needed in the coming years, if not in FY26.

Goals for FY26

Wildland Fire Program by developing the capacity to operate an aerial ignition UAS (“drone”).

- Strengthening partnerships with private



Given the proposed realignment of the USDA Forest Service program and field offices, it remains to be determined whether the federal allocation will be available to the State of Delaware.

This impacts half of the position funding and eliminates the monitoring and response for forest health threats. This elimination means that the state of Delaware will not have anyone monitoring and responding to threats on over 361,000 acres of forestland statewide.

A general fund allocation

Looking ahead, the Forest Health Program aims to expand monitoring, technology, and partnerships to protect Delaware's forests. Goals include:

- Continuing to monitor Beech Leaf Disease and sharing Delaware's plot data with the U.S. Forest Service to advance understanding of this emerging threat.
- Using new technology, such as Field Maps software on iPhones, to more efficiently track and respond to biotic and abiotic threats, including severe weather.
- Supporting DFS's

landowners, the forest products industry, USFS Forest Health Protection, DNREC, NGOs, and partners to expand Delaware's capacity for long-term forest resiliency.

To reach our forest health specialist, contact (302)698-4553 or visit de.gov/forestry.

*Left: Aerial Survey
Right: James Miracle using an Angle Gauge to determine basal area of a plot*



FOREST STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

Forests are among Delaware's most valuable natural resources, covering about 361,000 acres or nearly a quarter of the First State, according to the most recent Delaware Forest Service land use cover study. What may surprise many is that most of these forests, around 78%, are privately owned, mainly by individuals and families. These non-industrial private forest (NIPF) lands form the main part of Delaware's green infrastructure, providing many benefits to both people

and wildlife.

From providing clean water and better air quality to creating habitats for wildlife, offering recreational areas, and supplying valuable wood products, forests enrich the lives of Delawareans in many visible and invisible ways. However, these benefits are not automatic; they rely on careful, long-term management to help offset forest decline and threats. It is here where the Delaware Forest Service's Stewardship Program becomes essential.

By working with landowners, DFS provides guidance and expertise on writing forest management plans, conducting site evaluations, determining goals, and providing financial assistance to help them manage their forests sustainably, ensuring they remain healthy, resilient, and productive for future generations.

*Left: Delaware Forestry Association (DFA) Sawmill Tour of Absher Sawmill
Right: Logging Site Visit*





Launching of the Forest Resiliency Fund

The most significant achievement of Fiscal Year 2025 was the creation and launch of the Forest Resiliency Fund (FRF), a groundbreaking cost-share program for private landowners throughout Delaware. Support from the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) helped the Delaware Forest Service receive \$1.5 million to provide direct reimbursements between

90 to 100% for conservation practices, including tree planting, prescribed fire activities, and invasive species control.

For the first time, landowners in Delaware now have access to a funding source explicitly created to help them adopt practices that strengthen forests against climate change and boost long-term resilience. This milestone highlights both DFS's commitment to innovation and its dedication to providing

private landowners with the tools they need to care for Delaware's working lands effectively through active forest management.

Program Impact in FY25

Beyond launching the Forest Resiliency Fund, DFS foresters worked hard to assist landowners and oversee forestry activities across Delaware.

- 92 DFS Erosion & Sedimentation (E&S) permits issued, covering 2,145 acres statewide:
 - 23 permits in Sussex County (510.4 acres)
 - 57 permits in Kent County (1,429 acres)
 - 12 permits in New Castle County (205.7 acres)
- 257 site inspections conducted to ensure compliance and best management practices.
- 3 pre-commercial thinning projects implemented, covering 77 acres.
- 177.5 acres sprayed against competing vegetation for newly established forests.
- 14 new and revised Forest Stewardship Plans, guiding the management of 975 newly enrolled acres.
- 6 reforestation projects completed, planting of 79,520 trees across 173 acres.
- 135 Active Stewardship plans covering 13,277 acres on privately owned land.

These accomplishments highlight the Stewardship Program's vital role in safeguarding water quality, enhancing forest health, and assisting landowners in accomplishing science-based approaches to active forestland management.

Challenges of FY25

Despite this progress, the Forest Stewardship Program faced challenges that highlighted the importance of ongoing investment. The main issue was staffing shortages, which created significant pressure on existing senior foresters and slowed the program's growth. Additionally, while the new Forest Resiliency Fund addressed a significant gap, there remains a need for state-based cost-share funding to support more traditional forestry practices that fall outside FRF eligibility. Without this support, landowners often must wait for federal EQIP funding, a process that can take months or even years, delaying the completion of critical projects.

Looking Ahead: Goals for FY26

As we move into FY26, DFS plans to expand its services, strengthen its partnerships, and continue to safeguard Delaware's

forests through science-based stewardship practices.

- Increasing the number of Forest Stewardship Plans to ensure more acres are sustainably managed.
 - Expanding educational and outreach opportunities for private landowners and industry professionals.
 - Strengthening partnerships to provide more hands-on support.
 - Recruiting additional foresters to expand DFS's capacity to serve landowners.
 - Advance Delaware's Wood Industry
 - Seek out innovative companies to utilize Delaware's resources and fiber markets
- Bringing new





opportunities for the wood products industry into Delaware would provide wide-ranging benefits to the state and its communities. By offering stewardship services and sustainable forest management, DFS can create the conditions necessary to attract wood-processing businesses, mills, and related industries. These enterprises would not only strengthen Delaware's rural economy but also generate jobs, support local landowners, and create new markets for responsibly managed forest products. A stronger wood industry presence would keep more value-added production within the state, reduce reliance on out-of-state suppliers, and promote long-term economic resilience. To realize this vision, DFS requires increased general fund support to expand operations, enhance stewardship services, and build the infrastructure necessary for the wood industry to thrive in Delaware.

For assistance within the Forest Stewardship Program, contact (302)856-2893 or visit de.gov/forestry.



*Top: Product air drying at Absher Sawmill
Bottom Left: Logging Site visit
Bottom Right: Short's Sawmill*





Taber State Forest

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URBAN AND COMMUNITY FORESTRY

The Delaware Forest Service's Urban and Community Forestry (UCF) program continues to play a vital role in strengthening Delaware's communities by expanding and caring for the trees that shade neighborhoods, line streets, and enhance parks. In 2025, the program not only provided technical and financial assistance to municipalities but also hosted events and training sessions that brought together professionals, students, and residents to learn about the value of urban forests.

Spotlight on FY25 Events

This year featured several major outreach and training opportunities. The Arborist Seminar at Delaware Park Raceway and Casino attracted over 100 attendees for two days of presentations from eight speakers, with support from four vendors. It was the 10th annual event but had not been held since 2022

due to staffing shortages. The Urban and Community Forestry program also engaged in worldwide discussions through the Municipal Forestry Institute (MFI) in California, the Partners Conference, and guest lectures at the University of Delaware.

Community planting projects made a lasting impact at schools and public spaces, including Woodbridge High School, Delcastle Technical High School, and the Town of Bowers Beach. Each planting

added new trees to the landscape while involving students and residents about the importance of urban forestry practices.

Top: EHAB Training

Middle: Urban Community site visit

Grant Program Successes

Even with limited resources,



Bottom: Delaware school tree planting



for addressing dangerous trees on their property. Establishing dedicated state funding to address private property tree concerns remains a critical and ongoing challenge. The current program funding is 100% federally based, with no state funding.

At the same time, the program's limited staffing capacity makes it difficult to keep pace with growing demand. As Delaware's communities expand and urban forests become increasingly recognized for their role in climate resilience, stormwater management, and public health, requests for technical assistance, outreach, and grant support continue to rise. Without additional personnel, the UCF Program struggles to provide timely guidance, assist municipalities in developing management plans, and engage with the public at the level needed. These challenges highlight the importance of sustained state-level general funding to support capacity and ensure the program can meet community needs and safeguard Delaware's urban forests into the future.



UCF delivered strong results through its grant programs:

- Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) Grants: 16 communities received \$536,024.50, which is 89% of this programs funding.
- Ash Removal Grants: 4 communities received \$24,023.00, with 26% of the funds committed to

date.

- Invasive Species Removal Grants: 7 communities received \$25,000.00, with 100% of funding fully allocated.

Overall, the UCF program assisted 68% Delaware's municipalities, or 39 out of the 57.

Challenges Faced

The UCF Program continued to grapple with two significant challenges in FY25: funding limitations and staffing shortages. One of the most common requests from Delaware residents, particularly senior citizens, involves assistance with hazardous tree removals on private property. While these requests often reflect urgent public safety concerns, current funding streams, which originate from the U.S. Forest Service, restrict projects to public lands. This limitation creates a gap in service, leaving many residents without options



“ URBAN FORESTS ARE THE BACKDROP OF OUR COMMUNITIES

Goals for FY26

The primary goal for FY26 is to strengthen partnerships with municipalities and counties to advance urban tree canopy management, protection, and growth. This effort will include supporting the development of comprehensive tree management plans that provide communities with long-term strategies for planting, maintaining, and monitoring their urban forests.

In addition, the Urban and Community Forestry

Program will collaborate with local governments to develop and refine municipal ordinances that protect existing trees, promote proactive planting, and integrate canopy goals into broader land-use and climate resilience planning.

By combining technical guidance, grant support, and educational outreach, UCF aims to equip communities with the tools they need to make informed, sustainable decisions about their urban forests. These initiatives will not only expand canopy cover but also deliver a wide

range of benefits, including improved air and water quality, greater energy efficiency, reduced urban heat, and enhanced public health and quality of life.

Through these collaborative efforts, UCF seeks to ensure that Delaware's urban forests remain strong, resilient, and equitable resources for all residents.

For more information about our Urban and Community Forestry Program, contact (302)698-4578 or visit de.gov/forestry.





WILDLAND FIRE

Delaware Forest Service's Wildland Fire Program plays a vital role in protecting lives, property, and natural resources within the First State while also contributing to national wildfire response efforts.

In Delaware, the program leads fire suppression and prevention efforts, manages prescribed burns to reduce hazardous fuel loads, and assists private landowners

with fire management planning to improve forest health and resilience.

Beyond state borders, DFS wildland firefighters are mobilized to support large-scale incidents across the country, providing skilled crews that bring valuable experience back to strengthen local capacity. FY25 was a year marked by extensive training opportunities, increasing community demand for prescribed fire, and the unwavering dedication of our fire crews despite staffing and funding challenges.

*FY25 Crew sendoff at
Blackbird State Forest,
Tybout Tract*

Spotlight On FY25 Training and Events

Training remained a top priority for the DFS Wildland Fire Program in FY25, ensuring that Delaware's crews are well-prepared to meet both state and national fire management needs. The S-130/S-190 Basic Wildland Firefighter Courses—the foundational training required for all new wildland firefighters were offered in January, February, and April. Across these sessions, held at the Department of Agriculture and Blackbird State Forest, 27 new firefighters successfully

completed training. This intensive curriculum covers critical skills, including fire behavior, safety protocols, the use of hand tools and equipment, and the basics of suppression and prescribed fire operations.

In addition, the annual RT-130 Refresher Training was conducted at Blackbird State Forest in April, with 29 firefighters in attendance.

This course provides returning personnel with updated safety briefings, tactical refreshers, and hands-on scenarios designed to reinforce readiness for the upcoming fire season. These trainings not only equip participants with the technical skills needed for suppression and prescribed fire but also build teamwork, confidence, and interagency coordination all of which are essential to safe and effective



South Bowers Volunteer Fire Company receiving a grant through our program operations on the Fireline.

FY25 Program Data

- Wildfire Response: 28 incidents, 157.52 acres
- Volunteer State Wildfires: 1,189 incidents
- Prescribed Fire/Fuel Treatments: 38 incidents, 745.5 acres
- Mechanical Treatments: 206.08 acres.

Out-of-State Assignments

In addition to in-state work, Delaware firefighters contributed to wildfire response efforts across the country:

- Monument, OR – Topper (TFLDt), Boneyard Fire (7/22–8/9/2024)

Wildland Fire Crew receiving sawyer training at Blackbird State Forest, Tybout Tract





- Burns, OR - Burkentine (ENGB), BIFZ Support (7/23–8/6/2024)
- Trout Lake, WA – Topper (CWRB), GPF ABCD Misc. (8/20–9/2/2024)
- Trout Lake, WA – Burkentine (ENGB), GPF Misc. (9/4–9/16/2024)
- Denver, CO – Petersen, RMACC Support (7/29/2024)

These assignments not only supported national wildfire suppression efforts but also provided Delaware’s firefighters with valuable experience that strengthens the program at home.

Grant Support

Through grant funding, the program continued to strengthen local capacity:

- Volunteer Fire Company (VFC) Grants: 3 Companies, \$7,490 awarded
- Hazard Mitigation (HM) Grants: 3 communities, \$9,200 awarded.

Challenges Faced

Despite these successes, the program faced significant challenges. A persistent staffing shortage made timely fire response difficult, stretching resources thin across the state.

Limited funding created additional barriers, preventing the purchase

of essential tools, vehicles, and equipment needed for suppression and prescribed fire efforts. These constraints not only affected immediate operations but also slowed the program’s ability to modernize and progress. This is concerning, given that much of the program’s budget goes to volunteer fire departments through grants and hands-on training. It also presents a problem, since our equipment is outdated and is the only specialized wildfire response equipment in the state.

At the same time, demand for prescribed fire is increasing—from municipalities seeking risk reduction to farmers and sportsmen who recognize its ecological benefits. Without additional staff and reliable funding, the program was unable to meet all requests, which impacted both land management goals and community expectations.

The amount of adequate burn days in Delaware averages out to only 17 days per year (during the burn window), and with an increasing demand annually, it is presenting problems to achieve fuel reduction and habitat enhancement. To move forward effectively and build long-term capacity, the Wildland Fire Program requires proper equipment, general fund support, and



Achieving these goals will depend on securing the necessary resources. With proper equipment, staffing, and sustained general fund support, the program can expand training, respond more effectively to fires, and meet the growing demand for prescribed fire across Delaware.

To learn more about our Wildland Fire Program, contact (302)515-1027 or visit de.gov/wildfire.

Top Right: Port Penn Suppression Incident, photo courtesy Lisa Moy, DNREC Office of Communications

Bottom Right: Delaware Wildland Fire Crew responds to Washington State Incident

Left: Erich Burkentine assisting on a prescribed fire as FFT1 (Fire Fighter Type 1)

investment in personnel.

Program Goals for FY26

Looking ahead, the Wildland Fire Program is committed to strengthening capacity and expanding educational opportunities. Key goals for FY26 include:

- Engaging in more outreach activities and community events to build awareness of fire management within the fire service.
- Find a sustainable source of state-level funding to support operations and equipment which is relied upon by other state agencies and local fire departments.
- Hosting additional courses such as S-112

(Saw Operations) and S-212 (Wildfire Chainsaws) to expand firefighter skillsets.

- Delivering the S-131 Squad Boss course is an essential step in advancing leadership development within the fire service.



