



Forest Files

A Publication of the Delaware Forest Service
Conserve | Protect | Enhance

Building Resilient Forests for Delaware's Future

Published June 2026

By: Laura Upham | Stewardship Coordinator

One of the first lessons taught in forestry school is the "4 W's" of forestry: wood, water, wildlife, and recreation. While these four values provide a simple introduction to the importance of forests, they represent only a fraction of the benefits forests provide to our communities. Forests improve air quality, store carbon, protect water resources, reduce the impacts of severe weather, and provide countless recreational, ecological, and economic benefits for both people and wildlife.

Today, Delaware's forests face a variety of challenges. Development pressure, climate change, invasive species, and wildfire all threaten the health and sustainability of our forested landscapes. Addressing these threats requires active management and long-term investment in forest restoration and conservation. Fortunately, there are many tools available to help improve forest resilience. Prescribed fire can reduce hazardous fuel loads and lessen the risk of catastrophic wildfire. Invasive species management creates opportunities for native plants and wildlife to thrive. Reforestation and afforestation projects can establish diverse forests composed of native tree species that are better equipped to withstand future environmental challenges.

To support these efforts, the Delaware Forest Service established the Forest Resiliency Fund, which provides assistance to landowners implementing practices that enhance forest health and resilience across the state. Landowners who own less than 10,000 acres of forestland in the state of Delaware are eligible. This included non industrial private landowners, municipalities, county governments, and homeowners associations. Projects must be a minimum of 3 acres in size.

The Delaware Forest Service recently completed its first planting season through the Forest Resiliency Fund, marking an important milestone for the program. During this inaugural season, approximately 61,698 tree seedlings were planted, creating roughly 142 acres of new forest throughout Delaware. These projects were completed on private lands as well as properties owned by Sussex County and the City of Lewes.

Highlights from the first planting season include:

- 51 acres of mixed native hardwood forest established on Sussex County property.
- 23 acres of new forest created for two private landowners in Sussex County.
- Nearly one mile of riparian buffer in Kent County converted from a pine monoculture to a diverse native hardwood forest.
- 11 acres of new forest planted on City of Lewes property.
An additional 9 acres of new forest established for private landowners in Kent County.

These projects will provide lasting benefits for decades to come. The new forests will improve wildlife habitat, enhance water quality, increase carbon sequestration, and strengthen the resilience of Delaware's natural resources. Most importantly, they represent a significant investment in ensuring that future generations can continue to enjoy the many benefits that healthy forests provide.

As the Forest Resiliency Fund continues to grow, the Delaware Forest Service looks forward to partnering with more landowners and communities to restore, protect, and expand Delaware's forests, building a healthier, more resilient landscape for all.