Delaware Invasive Species Council

2026 Annual Meeting



October 20, 2026
Marydel, DE

DISC Annual Meeting Agenda

October 20, 2026

8:30	**Check-In & Networking**
9:00	**Welcome, Announcements, and Retrospective** Benjamin Schlusser, DNREC Division of Parks and Recreation, DISC Chair
9:30	**USDA's Maryland Detector Dog Program expands Horizons in Hunt for Rare and Invasive Species** Trevor Michaels, USDA
10:00	**Invasive Ticks in the Mid-Atlantic** Ashley Kennedy, DNREC Fish and Wildlife
10:20	**BREAK**
10:30	**Control of Invasive Aquatic Vegetation** Maria Psomas, DNREC Fish and Wildlife
10:50	**Natural World Values for Communication and Planning** Joe Thomas, Kendal Crosslands, DISC Board
11:10	**English Ivy Removal in Brandywine Park** Lucy Dinsmore
11:30	**Non-Native Species Management in DNPS Rewilding Project** Eric Zuelke, Delaware Native Plant Society
12:00	**LUNCH**
1:00	**Business Meeting** DISC Board
1:20	**DISC's Small Grant Program** Mike Steiger, DNREC Fish and Wildlife, DISC Board
1:30	**Delaware's Forest Resiliency Fund** Laura Upham, Delaware Forest Service
1:40	**Delaware's Diverse Ecosystems: An Overview** Bill McAvoy, DISC Board
2:40	**BREAK**
2:50	**Redtail Restoration: Reflections on Long Term Projects** Greg Gagliano, Redtail Restoration LLC
3:10	**Chronic Wasting Disease** Laurel Hossler, DNREC Fish and Wildlife
3:30	**NETWORKING SOCIAL HOUR**

Welcome, Announcements, and Retrospective
Benjamin Schlusser, DNREC Parks and Recreation, DISC Chair

Board Chair Benjamin Schlusser reflects on the past few years of the Delaware Invasive Species Council, talking about challenges, success stories, completed projects, and future ideas. DISC is an ever evolving organization that is always searching for new participants. Topics include DISC's newly minted Master Naturalist Local Organization Partner Status, its collaboration with the Brandywine Zoo, and its continuing quest to develop the comprehensive Delaware Invasive Species List.

Benjamin is the current DISC Chair and DNREC's Natural Areas Preservation Program Manager. He has extensive experience in invasive plant control, having worked as a land steward for both Delaware State Parks and the Brandywine Conservancy. Benjamin graduated from the University of Delaware with a B.S. in Environmental Science.

USDA's Maryland Detector Dog Program expands Horizons in Hunt for Rare and Invasive Species
Trevor Michaels, USDA

Originally developed to be used on Maryland's nutria eradication project, Wildlife Services (WS) first partnered with the USDA-APHIS National Detector Dog Training Center (NDDTC) in 2014 to train detector dogs to determine the presence/absence of nutria to ensure the success of trapping efforts. Detector dogs, unlike hunting dogs, are trained to find some aspect of the target animal, such as scat, and do not respond to the animal itself (i.e., do not trail, bay, or otherwise interact with the target animal). These canines ultimately helped bring nutria eradication to fruition. Their superior sensory ability makes dogs more efficient at searching landscapes to find a target than humans attempting to search the same area visually. Dogs can also cover more ground than their handlers, which effectively multiplies a search area. The WS canines have proven to be versatile tools for detecting various targets. In addition to nutria, the MDDP canines are also trained on small whorled pogonia (SWP) (*Isotria medeoloides*), a federally threatened orchid, feral swine (*Sus scrofa)* scat and carcasses, and red-tailed boas (*Boa constrictor*). The uses for detector dogs in wildlife management are nearly limitless, making them an invaluable resource for rare and invasive species management.

Invasive Ticks in the Mid-Atlantic
Ashley Kennedy, DNREC Fish and Wildlife

Over the last decade, ticks have become an increasing concern for people, wildlife, and domestic animals. Among the Delaware tick species of top concern for public health are the blacklegged tick (*Ixodes scapularis*), lone star tick (*Amblyomma americanum*), and the invasive longhorned tick (*Haemaphysalis longicornis*). The state tick program conducts statewide, year-round active and passive surveillance to gain a better understanding of tick ecology, phenology, distribution, and pathogen associations. While these surveillance efforts answered many of our most important tick questions, we are taking the next step of exploring tick management options to determine which control methods are best suited for use in different habitats across Delaware. This talk will summarize lessons learned from past tick control efforts as well as challenges and opportunities for future tick management projects in Delaware.

Dr. Kennedy is a Board Certified Entomologist and the state Tick Biologist. In this role, she conducts surveillance for ticks and tick-borne pathogens, educates the public about tick-associated risks, and investigates tick management methods. She holds graduate degrees in Entomology and Wildlife Ecology from the University of Delaware and previously worked at the Defense Centers for Public Health, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and Smithsonian Environmental Research Center. Ashley's interest in ticks began in 1990 when she was first diagnosed with Lyme disease.

Control of Invasive Aquatic Vegetation
Maria Psomas, DNREC Fish and Wildlife

Delaware's state-owned ponds require aquatic invasive species management to improve recreational fishing and boating access. Throughout 2026, sections of Wagamons, Millsboro, and Tub Mill Ponds were treated with herbicides to target species such as hydrilla (*Hydrilla verticillata*) and creeping water primrose (CWP, *Ludwigia peploides*) due to extensive growth impacting fishing access. Integrated pest management strategies implemented include bi-weekly pond assessments to determine extent of growth, chemical control, and continued monitoring of herbicide effectiveness. Sonar (a.i. Fluridone) formulations were applied to address hydrilla concerns. Aquaneat (a.i. glyphosate) was employed to treat CWP at Wagamons Pond, offering potential for longer lasting control, in comparison to contact herbicides. Aquaneat works systemically in CWP, increasing plant die-off through translocation of the chemical to the root system. Post-treatment observations suggest continued vegetation control with hydrilla, and improved control with CWP.

Maria Psomas is an Environmental Control Technician with the Delaware Division for Fish and Wildlife, working on invasive plant management in Delaware's public fishing ponds. She graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Marine Science from the University of Delaware in 2025 and is now looking forward to expanding her skills and experiences in environmental conservation and research.

Natural World Values for Communication and Planning
Joe Thomas, Kendal Crosslands Communities, DISC Board

Invasive species management is a massive and complex process. Part of this complexity is the vastly different values people hold towards invasive species and the natural world at large. This talk will review these values to help us as invasive species managers communicate more effectively with people and plan successful projects.

Joseph Thomas grew up in Wilmington, Delaware. He attended the University of Delaware majoring in Wildlife Conservation and Plant Science. Joe then obtained a Master's Degree in Plant Science focusing on weed management. Joe has been fortunate to work for a range of university, state, and non-profit organizations. Currently, Joe works for the Quaker based life plan community, Kendal-Crosslands Communities. He is also a board member of the Delaware Invasive Species Council. Joe's main professional interests are invasive species management, ecology, and natural land management.

English Ivy Removal in Brandywine Park
Lucy Dinsmore

Brandywine Park is infested with English ivy, but a group of volunteers is managing to cull it one tree at a time. In 2025 I started a project of cutting invasive vines off trees. The goal was to protect the dwindling urban forest and prevent ivy fruit growth and dispersal. The project scope was a 2-mile loop of the Brandywine River between Market St and the Augustine Cut-Off. What started as a rogue group hacking in the woods is now sanctioned by the Delaware State Parks. Volunteers are trained on the cut stump method and can apply herbicide under my guidance. The project started as a way to get people outside in the winter and find community. Since 2025, we've put in almost 460 hours, a value of $15,986! This will be our 3rd season, and I'm happy to share our progress, results, and methods.

Lucy Dinsmore owns and operates Plant Lady Lucy LLC, a design/build company specializing in native plants and stormwater solutions in Pennsylvania and Delaware. She

also manages the Catch the Rain program with White Clay Wild & Scenic River that incentivizes landowners to invest in green stormwater infrastructure. Lucy is an ISA certified arborist, holds a master's degree in horticulture from the University of Minnesota, and is an instructor at Mt. Cuba Center.

Non-Native Species Management in DNPS Rewilding Projects
Eric Zuelke, Delaware Native Plant Society

The Delaware Native Plant Society has been conducting rewilding projects since 2000 and has performed work on six reforestation projects, one pollinator habitat, and one wildlife pond. In all of our project sites, they have had to contend with non-native and invasive species of trees, shrubs, and grasses, and a few non-native insects using many different types of herbicides and pesticides. Eric will speak about the successes and failures they have encountered over the years doing non-native species management on a selection of these sites.

Eric Zuelke holds a Bachelor of Science from Ohio University in Wildlife Biology, class of 1994. He is a former Wildlife Biologist with the Delaware Natural Heritage Program from 1997 to 2001 where he performed population studies of birds, odonates, butterflies, and frogs. He joined the Delaware Native Plant Society (DNPS) in 1999 as the Newsletter Editor, and has been in the position of Treasurer since May 2000, Membership Coordinator since 2002, has been the Projects Manager since September 2004, and was their Nursery Manager from 2004 to 2011.

DISC's Small Grant
Mike Steiger, DNREC Fish and Wildlife, DISC Board

Michael Steiger is an Environmental Scientist III with the Fisheries Section of DNREC. He works on projects managing aquatic invasive species including Blue Catfish, Flathead Catfish, and Northern Snakeheads. Before working for DNREC he worked for a lake and pond management company in northern New Jersey for 7 years.

Delaware's Forest Resiliency Fund
Laura Upham, DE Forest Service

Delaware's forests provide valuable benefits to people and communities, from wood products and clean water to wildlife habitat and recreation. Maintaining healthy and resilient forests, however, can be challenging as landowners face pressures from invasive species, pests and disease, and a changing environment.

The Delaware Forest Resiliency Fund provides financial assistance to help a variety of landowners address these challenges and invest in the future of their forests. Through cost-share funding, landowners can undertake projects such as invasive species removal and control, prescribed fire, and afforestation.

By helping landowners overcome financial barriers, the Forest Resiliency Fund creates opportunities to put forest stewardship practices into action. Supporting landowners in managing invasive species can help protect the ecological, recreational, and economic benefits of Delaware's forests while building healthier and more resilient forests for the future.

Laura Upham is the Forest Stewardship Coordinator with the Delaware Forest Service. In her role, she works with forest landowners to promote healthy, productive, and resilient forests that provide a wide range of benefits—including wood, clean water, wildlife habitat, and recreational opportunities. Laura helps landowners identify stewardship goals and connect those goals with available technical and financial resources. Through her work, she supports landowners in making informed decisions that sustain Delaware's forests and the many benefits they provide to people, wildlife, and communities

Delaware's Diverse Ecosystems: An Overview
Bill McAvoy, DISC Board

A familiarity with Delaware's diverse habitats and plant communities is important when conducting invasive species control and habitat restoration or enhancement. This presentation will discuss the Delaware habitats and associated flora that are most vulnerable to invasive species establishment. This knowledge will hopefully help guide and establish priorities for management and restoration plans.

Prior to retirement after 35 years, Bill McAvoy was the botanist for the Delaware Dept. of Natural Resources within the Division of Fish & Wildlife. Bill was responsible for documenting the flora and their habitats of Delaware, with an emphasis on rare species. Bill is the primary author of the flora Delaware online database

(https://delflora.org/flora/), and has published numerous papers on the flora and plant communities of Delaware and the Delmarva Peninsula.

Chronic Wasting Disease
Laurel Hossler

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) has been reported in 37 states with Delaware being the most recent state to detect it. But what exactly is CWD, and how can it impact Delaware's deer population? This presentation will explain what CWD is, how it differs from other deer diseases, and what hunters and non-hunters alike can do to help Fish and Wildlife better understand this disease.

Laurel Hossler is the new Assistant Wildlife Disease Biologist for Delaware Fish and Wildlife. Her previous experience comes primarily from the Western United States where she tackled not only CWD but a variety of wildlife health concerns such as brucellosis and respiratory pathogens in Bighorn Sheep. She earned a Master's in Veterinary Microbiology and Pathology at Washington State University with a focus on factors influencing *T. gondii* transmission dynamics in wild sheep.