

Stormwater Workshops Teach Sussex County Landowners to Better Manage Open Space



UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE
**COOPERATIVE
EXTENSION**

RELEVANCE

Increase in permanent residents moving to the beach towns of Sussex County, Delaware, in the past few decades.

Census Data from 2010-2020

Increase in population in Sussex County

20%

197,145 237,378



43,000-Acres

Decrease in forested lands since 1998 according to the Delaware Forest Service.



The loss of these forested lands creates pressure on water quality for the Delaware Inland Bays and the Chesapeake Bay.

RESPONSE

The Sussex Conservation District led the Stormwater Workshop series in partnership with the University of Delaware Cooperative Extension and Nanticoke Watershed Alliance.

Targeting

- Small landowners
- HOAs
- Non-profits
- Government Agencies

Topics

- Stormwater 101
- Invasive species
- Management
- Urban and Community Forestry

30 Attendees

- 22** Homeowners
- 25** HOA Representatives
- 2** Non-profits
- 8** Government Employees
- 20** Developments Represented

The University of Delaware Cooperative Extension provided technical assistance and also presented on Right of Way Invasive Species Management.

RESULTS

When evaluating the program, we asked attendees about the knowledge they gained from each topic and also asked for ways they plan to use the information.

Topics	Knowledge Gained	Knowledge Used
• Stormwater 101	95% (21/22)	95% (21/22)
• Converting Lawns to Meadows	100% (10/10)	80% (8/10)
• Urban and Community Forestry	100% (10/10)	90% (9/10)
• Invasive Species Management	100% (14/14)	100% (13/13)
• Tax Ditches	100% (15/15)	87% (13/15)
• Designer Ditches	93% (14/15)	60% (9/15)

Some of the ways the attendees plan to use their knowledge gained during these events are:

- Phragmites removal is necessary, hope to add more appropriate plantings adjacent to ditches.
- Encourage my HOA to become educated on designer ditches and tax ditches instead of only relying on issues as presented by the property management company. All landowners, even those in developments, have a responsibility to assist in all aspects of good property and land management.
- Educate homeowners on the maintenance requirements of the stormwater management ponds.

RELEVANCE

The beach towns of Sussex County, Delaware, have long been a popular tourist destination for a variety of reasons. This includes beautiful Atlantic Ocean beaches and inland bays that provide recreation and scenery, entertainment, and plenty of outlet shopping. Over the past few decades, there has been an increase in permanent residents moving to the area. This shift has created a huge increase in both commercial and residential development. According to census data, Sussex County has seen a 20% increase in population from 197,145 to 237,378 between 2010 and 2020. This growth rate is more than double the growth rate of the US population and almost double the 10.2% growth rate for Delaware during this time. To accommodate this rate of growth, Sussex County has seen a 43,000-acre decrease in forested lands due to development since 1998, according to the Delaware Forest Service. The loss of these forested lands creates pressure on water quality for the Delaware Inland Bays and the Chesapeake Bay. It also represents a loss of critical wildlife habitat, further fragmenting a once heavily forested coastal plain. Both commercial and residential developments are designed with stormwater management in mind, particularly focused on water quantity and less on water quality. There are opportunities to manage open spaces and stormwater management areas to help recreate some of the ecosystem services lost by the destruction of Delaware's forested lands. Education and outreach are important tools to help homeowner's associations (HOAs) and land managers learn about these opportunities and then implement them on the ground.

RESPONSE

The Sussex Conservation District led the Stormwater Workshop series in partnership with the University of Delaware Cooperative Extension and Nanticoke Watershed Alliance. The series targeted small landowners, HOAs, non-profits, and government agencies. The topics ranged from Stormwater 101 to Invasive Species Management to Urban and Community Forestry. The University of Delaware Cooperative Extension attended the sessions to provide technical assistance and also presented on Right of Way Invasive Species Management. The series was well attended, both in person and virtually. There were more than 30 attendees from Sussex County in all three sessions. There has been a lot of development occurring in eastern Sussex County, and this series is a very important way for those living in these developments to learn about the proper management of open space/stormwater areas and the resources available to them. Across all three events, there were 22 homeowners, 25 HOA representatives, eight government employees, and two non-profit employees who attended. Additionally, there were 20 developments represented across Sussex County.

RESULTS

The goal of these workshops is to help create a more informed group of HOAs and land managers. When evaluating the program, we asked attendees about the knowledge they gained from each topic and also asked for ways they plan to use the information. Stormwater 101: Knowledge gained and used was 95%; Converting Lawns to Knowledge gained 100% and 80% used; Urban and Community Forestry- Knowledge gained 100% and 90% used; Invasive Species Management - Knowledge gained and used was 100%; Tax Ditches- Knowledge gained 100% and 87% used; Designer Ditches- Knowledge gained 93% and 60% used. Some of the ways the attendees plan to use their knowledge gained during these events are: Phragmites removal is necessary; hope to add more appropriate plantings adjacent to ditches; Encourage my HOA to become educated on designer ditches and tax ditches instead of only relying on issues as presented by the property management company. All landowners, even those in developments, have a responsibility to assist in all aspects of good property and land management.; Educate homeowners on the maintenance requirements of the stormwater management ponds.

RECOGNITION

The Sussex Conservation District led the coordination effort and delivery of the program. The Nanticoke Watershed Alliance, Delaware Forest Service, and University of Delaware Cooperative Extension provided technical assistance to attendees and provided presentations.

PUBLIC VALUE STATEMENT

Proper management of these areas will reduce the impacts on water quality in Delaware waters and help recreate ecosystem services that were lost during development.

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