

History of the Delaware Native Plant Society (DNPS) Reforestation Project at the Moore Farm Tract (NRWC), Sussex Co., Delaware

At its inception, one of the primary aspirations of the Delaware Native Plant Society was to do its part in reversing the loss of forest in Delaware. The principal method we wanted to use to achieve this objective was through the reforestation of fallow fields that were already retained in conservation status. Over the years, many people have contributed, and many hours have been spent in the implementation of this goal. This report is a summary of our efforts up to this point.

The First Exploratory Steps

The first exploratory conversation was between Eric Zuelke (DNPS Treasurer, and Projects Manager) and Marlene Mervine (Executive Director of the Nanticoke River Watershed Conservancy) during an in-person meeting on **6 Feb 2026**. Eric wrote and presented a proposal to Marlene on this day. She then presented it to their Board of Directors at their monthly meeting on Feb 17 and they unanimously agreed upon the project and discussed one particular site they wanted the project to be done in, which ended up being a small section of the Moore Farm Tract. This became the sixth reforestation project undertaken by the DNPS to date.

On **20 Feb 2026**, Eric Zuelke Spoke with Marlene again and they planned a site visit.

The Work That Has Been Accomplished

The first site visit occurred on **1 Mar 2026**, between Eric Zuelke, Marlene Mervine, Steve Cooper (President, NRWC), Harry Brake (Volunteer Coordinator, NRWC), and Rob Line (Non-native and Invasive Species Manager, NRWC). The site is located 200 meters due east of the intersection of Craigs Mill Rd., Figgs Rd., and the Craigs Pond boat ramp entrance, Sussex County, DE.

During this visit we mapped out the borders of the site, which ended up being exactly 43,969 ft² (1.009 acres), set steel U-posts with yellow painted tops and yellow flagging and metal ID tags at each corner, and took photos.



Marker Post A, 1 Mar 2026



Marker Post B, 1 Mar 2026



Marker Post C, 1 Mar 2026



Marker Post D, 1 Mar 2026

Well before the first real day of field work, Eric Zuelke went to the site on **30 July 2026** just to simply what the site looked like at that time of the year. It was only the second time he had been there and it was a fortuitous visit because while walking around he discovered a small grove of *Ailanthus altissima* (tree of heaven) on the edge of the site to be planted. There were dozens of stems growing (all under 10' tall) and they appeared to have been cut in the past but had continued to resprout because they had never been treated to kill the roots. In addition to the presence of this non-native, there were also dozens of *Lycorma delicatula* (spotted lanternfly, SLF).

On **3 Aug 2026**, Eric returned with the express intent of killing as many SLF's as possible and cutting the tree of heaven down. Armed with Cutter Essentials Natural Outdoor Insect killer, boots, loppers, and Tordon systemic root killer, he killed dozens of adult SLF's and destroyed the primary grove of *Ailanthus*. The weather forced him to stop, but the remaining trees were cut down later.

The reforestation section of the site was mowed for the last time **20 Sep 2026** by Steve Cooper. He also finished mowing the remaining *Ailanthus* stems which were chemically treated later.

The first planting day happened on **3 Oct 2026**. We had volunteers from the Seaford High School Upward Bound program, the Future Farmers of America program, two teachers from SHS, and one DNPS volunteer. The site was prepared by cutting down and stump treating six sweetgum, three loblolly pine, and two eastern red cedar that were very unhealthy looking. We also collected hundreds of *Passiflora incarnata* fruits in an effort to stop the spread of that non-native species. We installed 60 plants of 11 species, and put a tree tube around each one. All of this was done in on and off rain throughout the entire day, with temperatures in the low 60's.

Plants installed on 3 Oct 2026

Species	Common name	Quantity
<i>Quercus alba</i>	white oak	32
<i>Quercus montana</i>	chestnut oak	9
<i>Juniperus virginiana</i>	Eastern red cedar	4
<i>Diospyros virginiana</i>	persimmon	4
<i>Castanea dentata</i> x <i>mollissima</i>	American chestnut (with blight resistance)	3
<i>Prunus serotina</i>	wild black cherry	2
<i>Carya</i> spp.	hickories	2

<i>Carya glabra</i>	pignut hickory	1
<i>Acer rubrum</i>	red maple	1
<i>Asimina triloba</i>	pawpaw	1
<i>Amelanchier canadensis</i>	Eastern shadbush / serviceberry	1



Marker Post A, 3 Oct 2026, before planting



Marker Post B, 3 Oct 2026, before planting



Marker Post C, 3 Oct 2026, before planting



Marker Post D, 3 Oct 2026, before planting



Marker Post A, 3 Oct 2026, after planting



Marker Post B, 3 Oct 2026, after planting



Marker Post C, 3 Oct 2026, after planting



Marker Post D, 3 Oct 2026, after planting





An on-going record of the wildlife observed since **3 Oct 2026** to present day:

Colias eurytheme (orange sulphur)
Hyla versicolor (Eastern gray tree frog)
Terrapene carolina (Eastern box turtle)
Buteo jamaicensis (red-tailed hawk)
Dryocopus pileatus (pileated woodpecker)
Poecile carolinensis (Carolina chickadee)
Sayornis phoebe (eastern phoebe)
Cyanocitta cristata (blue jay)
Cardinalis cardinalis (northern cardinal)
Sciurus carolinensis (Eastern gray squirrel)