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Delaware Center for the Inland Bays Announces New Submerged Gravel Wetland Project

Georgetown, DE – The Delaware Center for the Inland Bays (Center) will begin constructing a Submerged Gravel Wetland (SGW) on former agricultural land owned by Sussex County, located at the intersection of Old Park Avenue and Springfield Lane in Georgetown, Delaware. This nature-based solution is a highly engineered wetland system that stores water and allows infiltration and denitrification before the water leaves the system, thereby reducing nutrient and sediment pollution in nearby waterways.

The landscape surrounding Delaware’s three Inland Bays, Rehoboth Bay, Indian River Bay, and Little Assawoman Bay, has shifted rapidly from farm and forests to developed land. More streets, sidewalks, driveways, and roofs reduce the “sponginess” of the open spaces they replace, accelerating the flow of water, sediments and pollution into our streams, rivers, and bays.

Without proper stormwater management, dense development can contribute up to four times more nitrogen than forested land. As a result, excess nutrients are causing murky waters and degraded habitat for aquatic life throughout the Inland Bays.

Submerged Gravel Wetlands provide a low-impact, effective solution to this challenge. Designed to mimic natural wetlands, SGWs use gravel and naturally occurring microbes to filter pollutants from stormwater before it reaches local waterways. By combining physical filtration with biological processes, these systems effectively remove nutrients, sediment, and other contaminations, helping to restore water quality and protect surrounding ecosystems.

“Sussex County has a long and proud track record working with the Delaware Center for the Inland Bays, and it is projects like this that are a continuation of that partnership to improve the environment and well-being of those living here and visiting Sussex County,” County Administrator Todd F. Lawson said. “By making this small investment of time and effort today, it means reduced runoff, cleaner waterways, and a healthier environment for tomorrow.”

This \$485,000 project is supported by a \$225,000 Congressionally Directed Spending appropriation through the EPA, thanks to Delaware's U.S. Senator, Chris Coons, and additional funding through a Clean Water Act Section 319 grant, Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act funds, and a Community Water Quality Improvement Grant from DNREC. Completion of this project is targeted for April 30, 2027.

About the Delaware Center for the Inland Bays

The Delaware Center for the Inland Bays, established in 1994, is a nonprofit organization and one of 28 National Estuary Programs dedicated to preserving, protecting, and restoring Delaware's Inland Bays and their watershed. For more information, please visit <https://www.inlandbays.org> or contact the Center directly at (302) 226-8105.



Photo provided by Phillip Miller, DNREC