



MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Draft Meeting Agenda

DATE: Friday, June 26, 2026

TIME: 9:30 am

LOCATION: 39375 Inlet Road, Rehoboth Beach, DE 19971

By computer: <https://meet.google.com/drb-snhz-dfk>

By phone: (401) 702-0407 PIN: 829 939 494#

MEETING CALLED BY: Aimee Isaac, Board Chair

ATTENDEES

Board Members Present:

Aimee Isacc (Board Chair), Patti Drago (Secretary) Jerry Esposito (Board-Elected), Jimmy Kroon (Dept of Ag), Claire Simmers (CAC Chair), Jamie Burke (Town of Millsboro), Andrew Wozniak (STAC), Amie Howell (EPA ex officio), Mike Harmer (Sussex Co. Engineer), Nicole Bailey Ashton (Board-Elected), Steve Hohman (EPA), Tyler Brown (Sussex Conservation District), Marlene Saunders (Board-Elected), Pat Coluzzi (Vice Chair), Steve Williams (DNREC)

DE Center Staff: Christophe Tulou, Bryan Ochs, Bob Collins, Mary Kunst, Shannon Clark, Jaime Argo, Nivette Perez-Perez, Taylor Hoffman, Meghan Noe Fellows, Lisa Swanger, Milan McWilliams, Megan Frady, Michael Franc, Daniel Fulton

Call to Order; 9:31AM by A. Isaac

Pledge of Allegiance & Introductions- The meeting attendees introduced themselves.

Meeting Agenda Review- A. Isaac called for any changes to the meeting agenda. There were none.

Secretary's Report- Aimee Issac confirmed that the Board members received the minutes from the previous meeting. A. Issac called for comments or changes.

Treasurer's Report- In lieu of the Treasurer, J. Argo gave a Financial update from the latest Financial Committee meeting.



Other Reports

CAC (Citizen Advisory Committee): Claire Simmers gave an update. April meeting focused on resilience and environmental sustainability. The next meeting on August 27th will continue the resilience theme with a focus on public policy, featuring Senator Stephanie Hampton and Susan Love from Denreck. The "Resilient Earth Resilient Communities" traveling exhibit will be hosted from August 29th to October 24th.

STAC (Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee): Andrew Wozniak gave the update. The April 10th meeting focused on contaminants. Presentations included PFAS compounds in St. Jones and Little Creek watersheds, statewide PFAS monitoring, microplastics in Delaware Bay, and saltwater intrusion vulnerability, highlighting the Inland Bays as highly susceptible.

CPE (Community Pathways for Engagement Committee): Marlene Saunders gave the update. Formerly the DEI Committee, it was renamed due to changes in administration's approach to DEI. The committee aims to focus on environmental justice and ensuring a wholesome environment for all.

Development Committee: Jerry Esposito gave the update. Actively seeking sponsorships for upcoming events; monthly key donors including Carl Freeman Foundation, Austin F. Okie, and Sussex Conservation District. Work is focused on Decked Out in September and finding auction items. A new fundraising platform has been incorporated to boost participation and donations.

Sussex County- Update by Mike Harmer. Focus on septic elimination and wastewater regionalization. Pollutant Removal: Septic elimination projects have removed significant pollutants, with Joy Beach (119 septs) removing 4426 lbs nitrogen and 1200 lbs phosphorus. Plans for 2024 include 421 systems removed, totaling 15,000 lbs nitrogen and 4,000 lbs phosphorus.

DNREC-Update by Secretary Patterson. Wetlands protection bill is in the final stages thanks to Senator Hansen. DNREC is ready for the regulatory side of the legislation. The new DNREC Environmental Science Lab opened which will allow for more robust water quality testing and monitoring. Steve Williams added Clean Water Act (CWA) & Regulatory Reviews. The division has submitted its even-year integrated report to the EPA and is preparing for a late-August public workshop to advance its tri-annual water quality standard updates into regulation. The SAV program has collected eelgrass and widgeon grass seeds across multiple states and regional sites for processing at the Lewes facility ahead of planned restorations in the Indian River Bay in Fall 2026. First State Crane successfully moved 73,000 cubic yards of sand before the summer pause, while a federal \$30 million request moves forward to potentially combine with \$17 million in Army Corps funds for a massive Rehoboth-to-Fenwick nourishment project.



DDA- Update by Jimmy Kroon. There is an increase in funding from the February proposal for cover crops, alongside continued funding for the crop insurance subsidy. Farmland preservation received flat funding compared to previous periods. A pilot deer damage program was recently added to the bond bill, and a new state-level "Farm to Community" program was established within the Department of Agriculture to ensure continuity if federal funding ever ceases. Overall, these legislative and budget items aim to provide critical financial relief to a struggling agricultural industry that forms a major part of the watershed's land use.

EPA- Update by Amie Howell. Kate McManigal is the EPA's new Water Division Director, taking over for Michelle Price-Fay. Delaware is receiving major EPA funding, including \$64 million for DHSS drinking water, over \$20 million for DNREC, and \$1.7 million for the Center \$910,000 IJA grant. National NEP program and evaluation guidance revisions are currently underway. The EPA Wetlands Branch completed a successful watershed tour hosted by Megan Noe Fellows to study the Center's diverse reforestation techniques and project evolution.

House & Senate- Thank you to Senator Hansen for her work on the wetlands bill.

Old Business

Federal Funding Status- Update by Christophe Tulou. **EPA Funding:** The Center received its final installment of five-year IJA funding and is drafting a work plan for a \$850K EPA Section 320 base funding request. **Budget Stability:** Strong bipartisan congressional support has kept National Estuary Program funding stable, shielding it from broader proposed 25% EPA budget cuts. **Thompson Island Project:** A \$4.2 million federal funding request to finish the project has been advanced by both state senators through NOAA and Fish & Wildlife appropriations, sparing the EPA's core budget.

New Business

Staff Presentation- Bays to Backyards Program- Presentation by Lisa Swanger, Director of Education and Outreach.

Approval of new CAC member- John Fehrenbach. No opposed. Approved.

Election of new Board member- Pat Coluzzi nominated Richard Mais as the new board member. Jerry Esposito seconded. No opposed. Approved.



Election of new Board Treasurer- Pat Coluzzi nominated Richard Mais to be the new board Treasurer. Jerry seconded. No opposed. Approved.

FY2025 Financial Statements & Auditor's Communications- Update by Bryan Ochs. Reported that we received a clean, unmodified audit opinion; we also underwent a Single Audit with no findings, questioned costs or material weakness that would jeopardize our federal funding. Reported that 78% of all funding went directly to programs with only 6% of expenses going to fundraising; reviewed auditor's recommendations for improving efficiencies and cash management. B. Ochs

Approval of FY27 EPA Workplan-Update by Bryan Ochs. Will send via email for approval when complete. It was agreed that approval via email is acceptable with a formal vote at the October board meeting.

Approval of Draft FY2027 Budget- Update by Bryan Ochs. Will send via email for approval when complete. It was agreed that approval via email is acceptable with a formal vote at the October board meeting.

Executive Director's Report- Infrastructure & Facility Upgrades (James Farm) Connected to Sussex County water (safe drinking water); the old well will now irrigate a new greenhouse. The site also features a new educational building, moving beyond 30 years of purely outdoor facilities. The Center will be hosting a National Science Foundation traveling exhibit on climate resilience from August to October. We secured \$1.25M for natural resource/carbon sequestration projects (marsh restoration, living shorelines). Seeking multi-year funding to match long project timelines. Running a soil-sampling project to baseline and compare traditional tree planting against high-efficiency "nucleation" (mini-forest) techniques. Reforestation: Planted 40,000 trees at the wastewater treatment facility. Completed Phase 1 at Thompson Island (wave attenuation devices) to protect natural and cultural resources. Launching a living shoreline project at Pasture Point featuring an oyster reef and vegetation to combat severe erosion. Completed an Eagle Scout windbreak project at James Farm demonstrating how developers can meet Sussex County's new 50-foot buffer ordinance. We also had a volunteer surge of over 400 total volunteers, with 315 trained this spring (including 113 newcomers). "Bays to Backyards" Program: Engaging local HOAs on community-led flood resilience and education in Delaware's highly vulnerable, low-lying areas. C. Tulou

Public Comment- No public comment

Adjourn- 11:44 AM

Please note that this is a business meeting of the Center. The Board will not consider any questions or comments from the public until the Public Comment period. Thank you for your understanding and adherence to this policy.