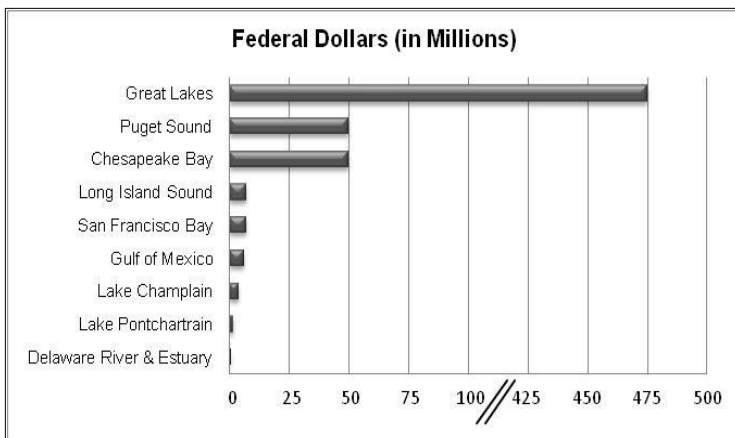


# Delaware River Basin Conservation Act of 2011

*Unlike other geographic watershed programs, the Delaware River Basin currently lacks a Basin-wide coordinated conservation strategy and dedicated federal support. The Delaware River Basin Conservation Act of 2011 employs a **voluntary, non-regulatory** dual approach focused on both optimizing collaboration in conservation work throughout the entire basin and increasing resources and local capacity for on-the-ground and community-based projects. Your support for this legislative effort is critical to successful conservation in the Delaware watershed.*



An impaired Delaware River watershed negatively impacts public health and living resources and threatens commercial and recreational fisheries, tourism, and the overall quality of life for the region's residents. For decades the Chesapeake Bay, Great Lakes, and other geographic regions have received significant dedicated federal funding to address these issues, primarily through the Environmental Protection Agency's Geographic Programs, while the Delaware has lagged behind in conservation dollars. The Delaware Estuary receives funding through the National Estuary Program (NEP).

## Background

- The Delaware River Basin includes the Delaware River watershed in New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware and the Delaware Bay. The Basin is home to more than 8 million people, and 15 million depend on it as an economic engine, a place of recreation, source of clean drinking water, and a vital habitat for fish and wildlife.
- The Basin encompasses significant acres of wetlands and about fifty percent of the Basin is covered by forest. This landscape provides essential ecosystem services, including recreation, commercial, and water quality benefits. Unfortunately, much of the remaining exemplary natural landscape is vulnerable to further degradation.
- The Delaware River is the longest undammed river east of the Mississippi, and a critical component of the National Wild and Scenic River System in the Northeast.
- Proper management of the river and water volume in the Basin is critical to flood damage mitigation and maintaining healthy habitat for fish and wildlife. Following three major floods in the last five years along the river, the Governors of Delaware, New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania have called for protection of natural flood control mechanisms to combat the problem.
- Although organizations like the Partnership for the Delaware Estuary and the Delaware River Basin Commission are successful in their respective efforts, existing programs have limited resources to fully address the habitat, recreation, and water-related challenges in the entire Basin in a fully coordinated manner. In addition to current Basin funding and programs, a new, dedicated source of federal resources would bolster restoration and conservation in the region through strategic grant-making and more coordinated implementation of existing funding mechanisms at the Federal, regional, State, and local level.



# Delaware River Basin Conservation Act of 2011

## Bill Summary

- The Act requires the Secretary of the Interior to establish the Delaware River Basin Restoration Program (Program) within the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service). In establishing the Program, the Director of the Service is required to institute a new partnership --- specifically, to work in consultation with existing management structures to identify, prioritize, and implement restoration and protection activities in the entire Basin and adopt a basin-wide investment strategy for implementation of the Program (Section 4).
- The primary purpose of the Program is to develop and implement **a coordinated approach** to sustain and enhance habitat, water quality and flood control improvements for fish, wildlife and people. Recreation, public access, land-use planning, public outreach, and citizen involvement will also play a role in the Program. Investing in an appropriate level of planning, monitoring and evaluation will be necessary to maximize success of the Program.
- An important component for realizing conservation success for wildlife and people in the Basin is a well-funded **competitive grant program**. The Director, in conjunction with key partners, would establish the grant program and provide for additional technical assistance to support on-the-ground projects. Consultation with the EPA, NOAA, USACE and other public agencies and organizations with authorities for planning and implementation of conservation strategies in the Basin is specifically required by the Act (Section 5).

- The Delaware River Basin Restoration Grant Program will support locally-driven, on-the-ground projects by non-profits, universities, state and local governments, community organizations and others. The federal share of each project is up to 75 percent.
- As proposed, \$5 million/annually would be authorized for the program. A minimum of 75 percent must be used for the grant program and other technical assistance projects (Section 6).

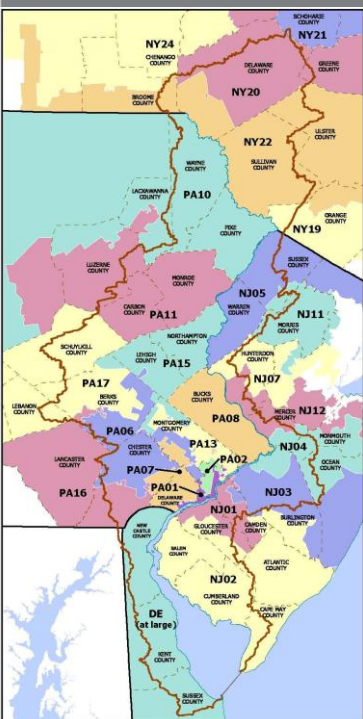


Photo: Adam Davis; Delaware Bay, DE

## Highlights:

- The Program will bolster federal resources to implement a voluntary and non-regulatory *Basin-wide* coordinated approach to sustaining and enhancing habitat, flood damage reduction and water quality improvements for fish, wildlife and people.
- Continued funding for existing federal (i.e. National Estuary Program) and state (i.e. Delaware River Basin Fish and Wildlife Management Cooperative) programs is important and would be complemented by new resources provided through the Program.
- Competitive grants may support on-the-ground projects such as:
  - Restore and protect wetlands, forests and streams to: benefit fish and wildlife, help to maintain water quality, enhance recreation, reduce flood damage and provide carbon sequestration.
  - Revitalize waterfronts to benefit communities engaged in shifting their river resources from relic, contaminated industrial properties to vibrant areas with a mix of recreational, residential, commercial and natural resource uses.
  - Address storm water and toxic pollution problems to improve habitat, water quality and recreational/commercial uses.
- Technical assistance may support projects such as:
  - Science support; GIS and Mapping; primary research
  - Monitoring and evaluation
  - Education and outreach