



PRESS RELEASE

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WIIN Study Calls for Economic Investment in Milford, Slaughter Beach

Strategy re-brands the Mispillion River as “Delaware’s Hidden River”

MILFORD, Delaware — Recognizing the economic value and biodiversity of the Milford and Slaughter Beach areas of Delaware, more than a dozen national, state, and local partners have invested \$220,000 and more than two years into a study that calls for investments to maintain and enhance their value for the future.

This coalition of partners called the Waterways Infrastructure & Investment Network (WIIN) received a National Fish & Wildlife Foundation’s (NFWF) National Coastal Resilience Fund grant to conduct this study. The WIIN project culminates in today’s release of an “Ecotourism and Resilience Investment Strategy for the Mispillion and Cedar Creek Watersheds” which details how ecotourism and other nature-based investments can sustain and enhance benefits to this region for generations to come. The strategy re-brands the Mispillion River as “Delaware’s Hidden River” awaiting to be discovered and celebrates Cedar Creek as “naturally pristine,” according to findings in the strategy. Milford and Slaughter Beach each recently passed municipal resolutions endorsing this effort.

The Mispillion River, Cedar Creek, Delaware Bay, and the vast marshes connecting them are part of an international flyway for migrating birds and a horseshoe crab sanctuary, which brings tourist dollars to the area and secures land value for residents. In addition, the marshes act as a “coastal stronghold” for managing the effects of sea level rise, including reducing property damage from flooding. Together, these resources produce multiple benefits to the state and to Milford and Slaughter Beach in particular. Early on in the project, WIIN produced an economic valuation study led by the University of Maryland’s Environmental Finance Center that found that the region’s natural resources generate millions of dollars in value related to recreational and leisure activities alone.

“The Mispillion River runs right through our city, Milford Mayor Archie Campbell said. “It was always an important part of our downtown and maritime heritage, but now we have a better understanding of its value and how it contributes to our quality of life.”

Today, those benefits are at risk of erosion by encroaching development and a rate of sea-level rise that is twice the global average. In response, WIIN gathered input from community leaders, stakeholders, and coalition partners to develop an investment strategy that bases the future resilience of the region on the health and

longevity of the natural resources. WIIN believes that the value of these resources need active investment in conservation, restoration, civic involvement, and eco-friendly approaches to economic development. The resulting investment strategy uses ecotourism as an important element for enhancing value while incentivizing resilient and sustainable management of the natural environment.

“I like that this plan recognizes that the natural resources in Slaughter Beach are too important not to protect,” Slaughter Beach Mayor Bob Wood said. “The WIIN strategy is about balancing economic opportunity with conservation and finding ways to be more resilient so that everyone gains. This effort is a game changer for us.”

The WIIN coalition is comprised of the Delaware Resilient and Sustainable Communities League (RASCL), Delaware Sea Grant, the project’s manager; the University of Maryland Environmental Finance Center, which authored the economic study and investment strategy; and the Partnership for the Delaware Estuary (PDE), the project's administrative and fiscal agent, who also developed a vulnerability assessment tool for the coalition. With the City of Milford, the Town of Slaughter Beach, and The Pew Charitable Trusts, WIIN won a \$220K grant from NFWF National Coastal Resilience Fund. Other coalition partners include Southern Delaware Tourism, the Nature Conservancy, Delaware Nature Society, Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control, Sussex County, Kent County, I.G. Burton, David Burton, and Tony Pratt. Ben Muldrow of Arnett, Muldrow & Associates developed the branding and marketing strategy..

The work of the WIIN coalition increased the capacity of each town to attract partners and investment to the region. It has also generated related initiatives, including the submission of a grant application to develop a contiguous bike path between the two towns, a demonstration project in Slaughter Beach to test the feasibility of growing oyster spat for aquaculture purposes, and a comprehensive coastal resilience planning effort between Slaughter Beach and the University of Delaware’s Coastal Resilience Design Studio.

Danielle Swallow, Coastal Hazards Specialist for Delaware Sea Grant, believes that more good things will come in the future. “This region is too valuable not to invest in it,” Swallow said. “And now we have the attention of state, county, local, and even federal partners, which is key because there are important initiatives we can link into.”

Partners also hope to support the Corps’ implementation of provisions in recent legislation that will make it easier for Delaware’s coastal towns to compete for beach nourishment and dredging projects.

Members of the media are invited to an outdoor reception to celebrate the release of the “Ecotourism and Resilience Strategy for the Mispillion and Cedar Creek Watersheds” at 10 a.m. on Friday, March 31 at Bicentennial Park in Milford. **This reception is to thank coalition partners and stakeholders and is not open to the public.**

The investment strategy is available on at www.derascl.org/wiin.

The Partnership for the Delaware Estuary, host of the Delaware Estuary Program, leads collaborative, science-based efforts to improve the Delaware River and Bay, which covers portions of Delaware, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania.

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