

# Delaware Conservation Blueprint:

## A Map Analysis of Open Space, Sea Level Rise, and Wildlife Habitats



Big Stone Beach, Kent County, DE. ©Deb Felmev



Prepared for the Delaware Land Protection Coalition  
by The Nature Conservancy

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# The Delaware Land Protection Coalition

The Delaware Land Protection Coalition (DLPC) is a group of conservation-focused organizations committed to increasing the amount of Delaware lands—including natural, cultural, historical, and recreational resources—protected via acquisition or conservation easement.

DLPC members include:

**Brandywine Red Clay Alliance**  
**Delaware Center for Inland Bays**  
**Delaware Nature Society**  
**Delaware Ornithological Society**  
**Delaware Wild Lands**  
**Ducks Unlimited**  
**Kent County Conservancy**  
**Land Trust Alliance**  
**League of Women Voters**  
**Mt. Cuba**  
**Nanticoke River Watershed Conservancy**  
**The Nature Conservancy**  
**Preservation Delaware**  
**Sierra Club**  
**Sussex County Land Trust**



# The Delaware Conservation Blueprint

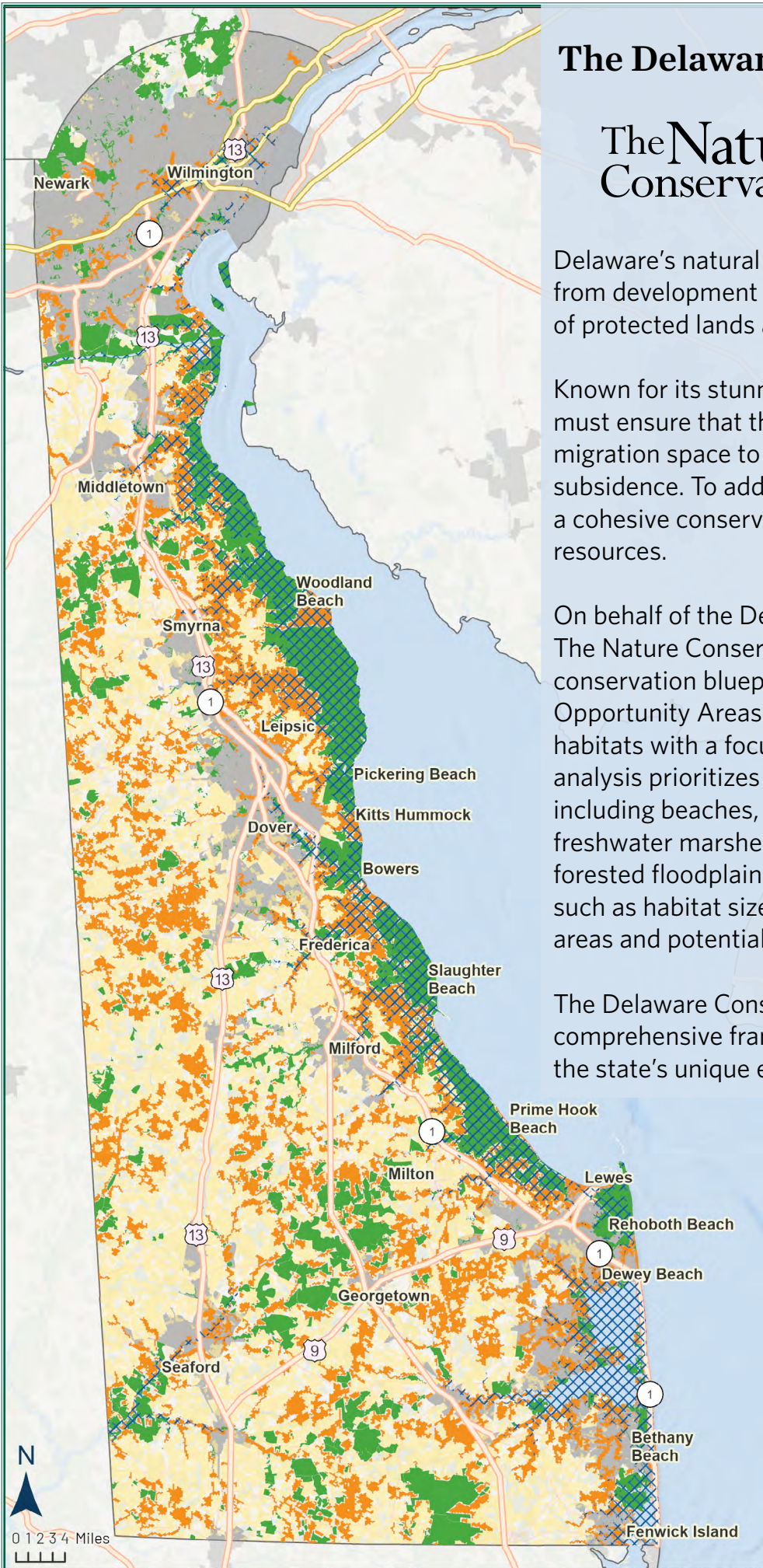


Delaware's natural lands are under increasing pressure from development and sea level rise (SLR). By 2050, 46% of protected lands are projected to be impacted by SLR.

Known for its stunning beaches and marshes, Delaware must ensure that these vital ecosystems have adequate migration space to adapt to coastal inundation and subsidence. To address this challenge, the state needs a cohesive conservation vision to safeguard its natural resources.

On behalf of the Delaware Land Protection Coalition, The Nature Conservancy has developed a statewide conservation blueprint that identifies Conservation Opportunity Areas (COAs) to protect critical wildlife habitats with a focus on those at risk from SLR. This analysis prioritizes Delaware's key habitat types, including beaches, dunes, coastal forests, tidal and freshwater marshes, small rivers, and associated forested floodplains and wetlands. It considers factors such as habitat size, connectivity, proximity to protected areas and potential marsh transition zones.

The Delaware Conservation Blueprint provides a comprehensive framework to guide the conservation of the state's unique ecosystems.

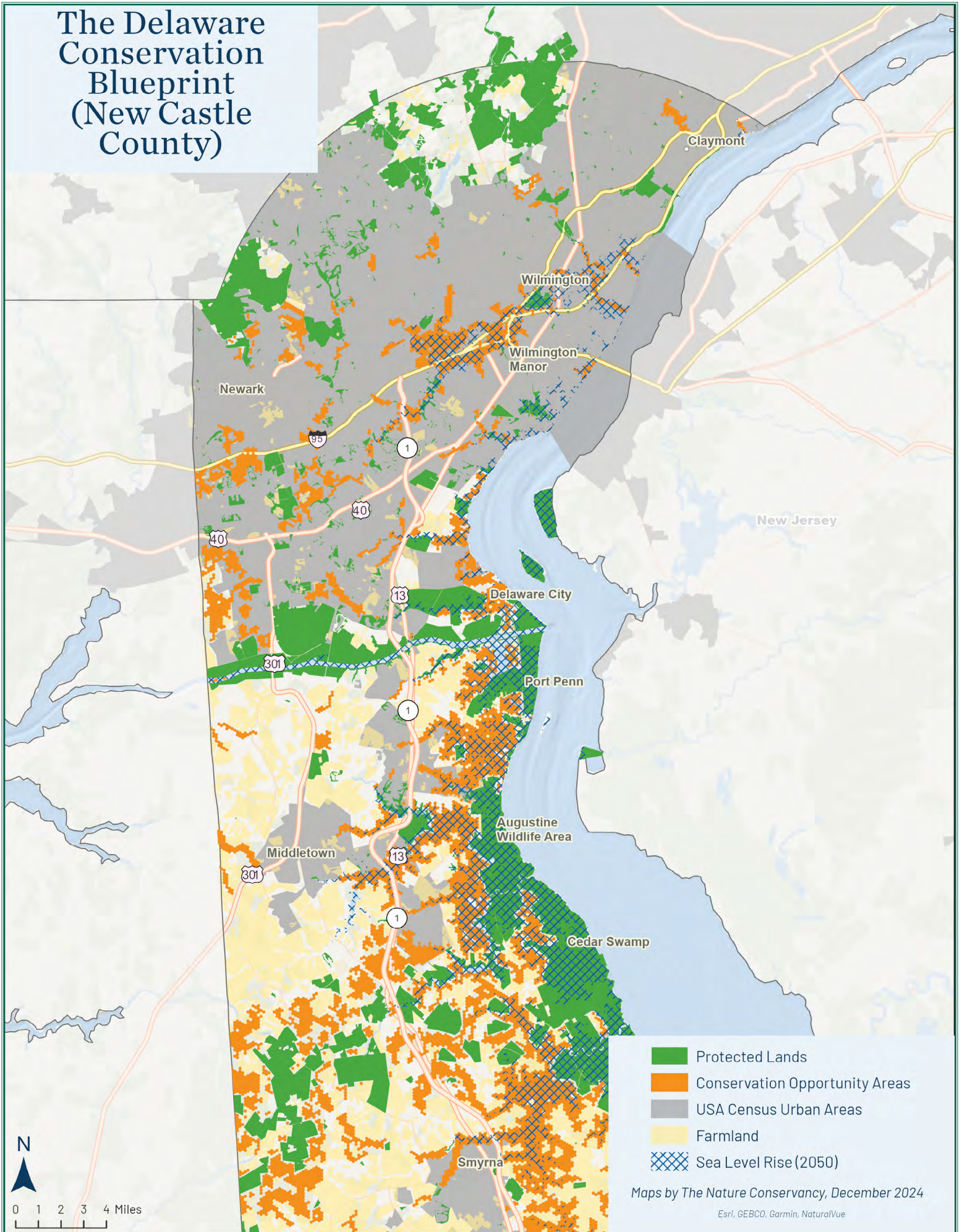


- Protected Lands
- Conservation Opportunity Areas
- USA Census Urban Areas
- Farmland
- Sea Level Rise (2050)

Maps by The Nature Conservancy, December 2024

Esri, GEBCO, Garmin, NaturalVue

# The Delaware Conservation Blueprint (New Castle County)

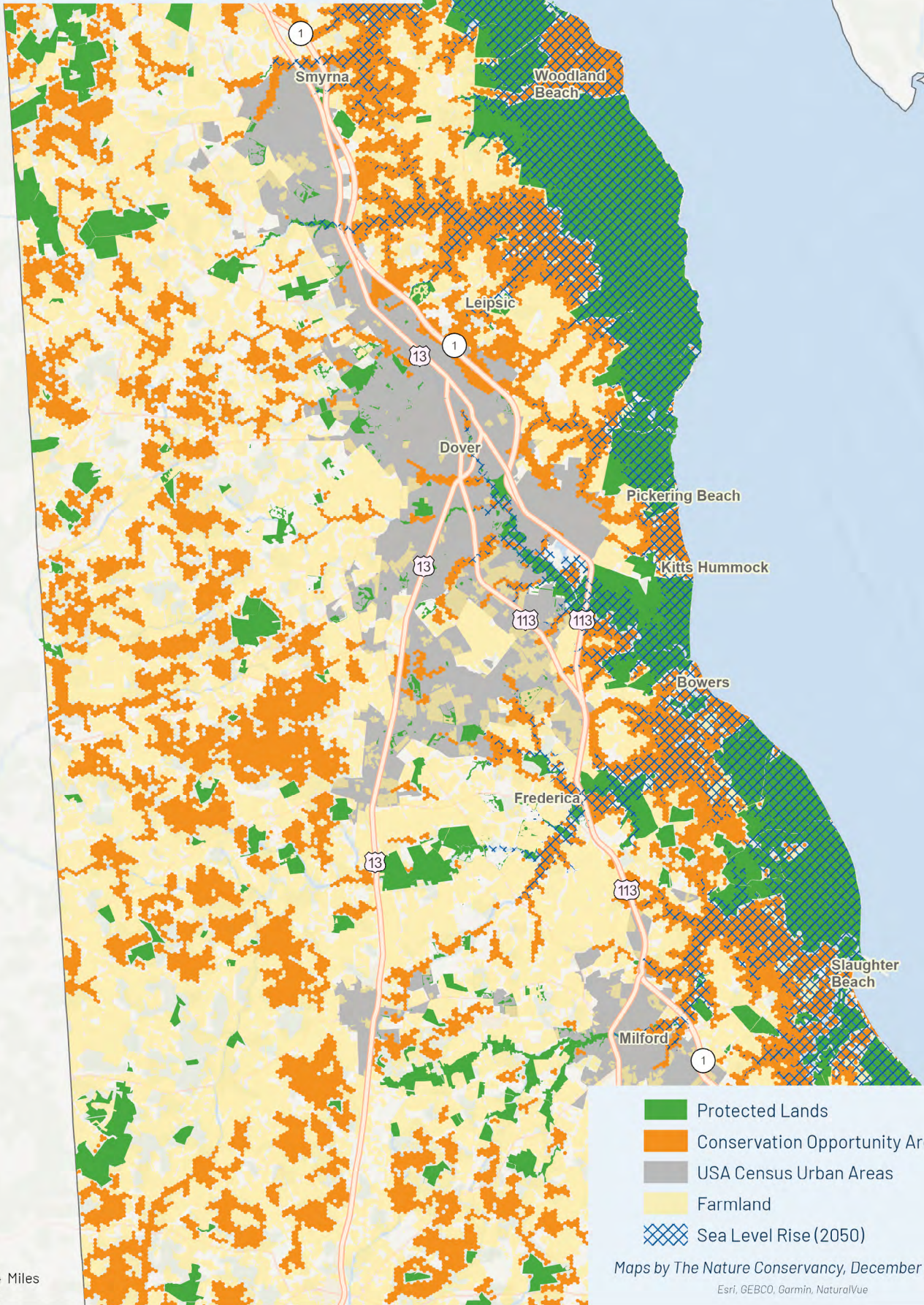


- Protected Lands
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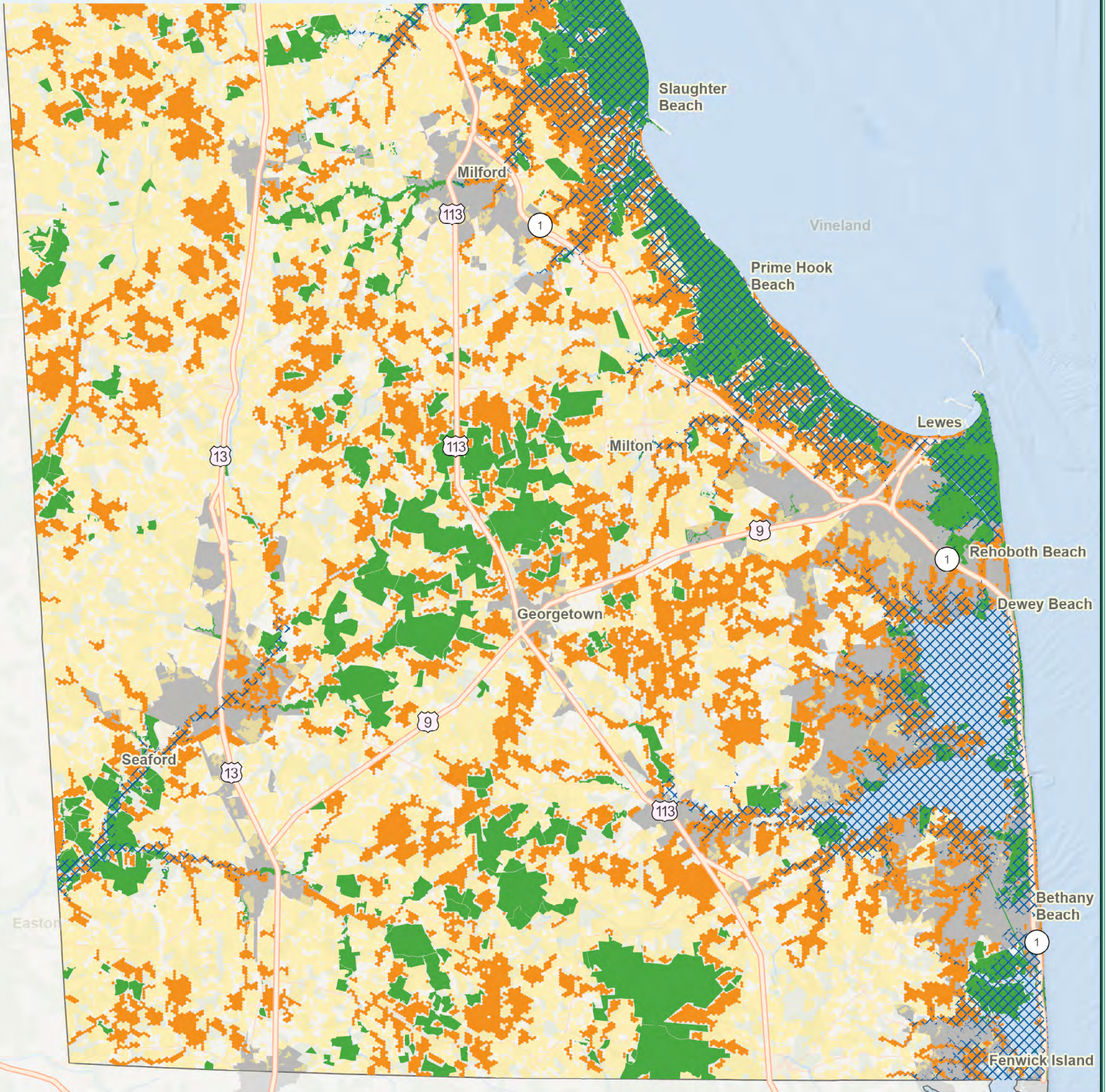
# The Delaware Conservation Blueprint (Kent County)



Maps by The Nature Conservancy, December 2024

Esri, GEBCO, Garmin, NaturalVue

# The Delaware Conservation Blueprint (Sussex County)



- Protected Lands
- Conservation Opportunity Areas
- USA Census Urban Areas
- Farmland
- Sea Level Rise (2050)

Maps by The Nature Conservancy, December 2024

Esri, GEBCO, Garmin, NaturalVue

# Methodology

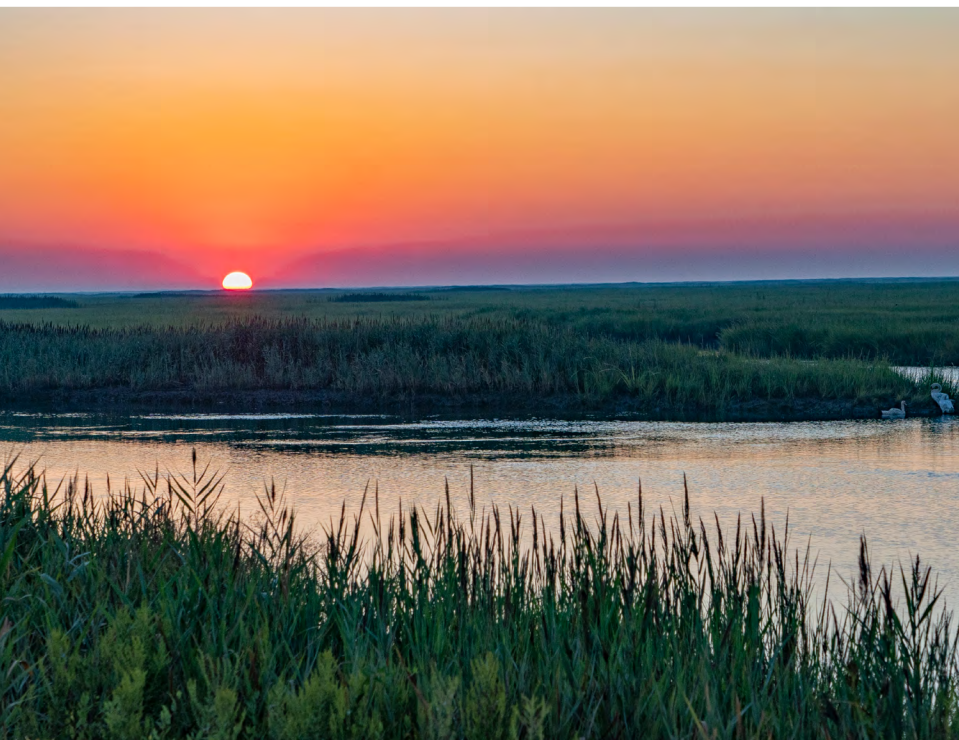
The Nature Conservancy (TNC) used existing datasets to produce the Delaware Conservation Blueprint, including habitat types from the Northeast Habitat Classification ([Anderson et al., 2013](#)), coastal inundation projections ([Delaware Geological Survey, 2016](#)), 1-meter land cover ([Chesapeake Conservancy](#)), the DE Ecological Network, and protected lands ([DE First Map](#)).

Conservation Opportunity Areas (COAs) focus on rare target habitats (maritime forest, beach, dune, peat swamp) of any size and other target habitats (salt marsh; swamp; hardwood forest; tidal creeks and headwaters; tidal small and medium rivers; warm, low-gradient headwaters and creeks) in patches greater than 100 acres that are adjacent to protected lands and within DE Ecological Network corridors and cores. COAs also include potential marsh/ecosystem transition zones that are in natural cover and between 5-foot and 7-foot SLR projections.

TNC works globally and in Delaware to protect the lands and waters upon which all life depends. To learn more, please visit [nature.org/Delaware](https://www.nature.org/Delaware). A digital version of this report may be found at [nature.org/DEBlueprint](https://www.nature.org/DEBlueprint).

For more information, please contact Emily Knearl, TNC Delaware Director of Government Relations and External Affairs, at [emily.knearl@tnc.org](mailto:emily.knearl@tnc.org).





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