

Local  
Postal Customer

PRSR STD  
ECRWSS  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
EDDM RETAIL

# High Tide News

October 2013

Local news for the people, by the people



Vol. 01 Num. 05

[www.hightidenews.com](http://www.hightidenews.com)

## Great Cypress Swamp

For more than 50 years Delaware Wild Lands, Inc. has been fulfilling their mission. Delaware Wild Lands, Inc. is a non-profit conservation organization dedicated to protecting and restoring Delaware's important natural areas through the purchase and management of strategic parcels of land.

The Great Cypress Swamp covered 60,000 acres in Delaware and nearby Maryland. Today, blanketing more than 10,500 acres, Delaware Wild Lands' Great Cypress Swamp (located in Sussex County, Delaware) is the largest remaining tract of contiguous forest on the Delmarva Peninsula and one of its most unique wetland systems. The land mass is the headwaters for Delaware's Inland Bays and the Pocomoke River, which flows into the Chesapeake Bay. Historically Bald Cypress and Atlantic White Cedar forests dominated the Swamp, but have declined dramatically since the time of colonial settlement. Today there is a mixture of trees including loblolly pine, maple and sweet gums.

### What happened to the trees?

Since the days of Delaware's colonial settlement and over the course of history since, Delaware's freshwater wetlands have been extensively filled, ditched, drained, diked, and built over to accommodate agriculture and an increasing level of development. An extensive network of historic drainage ditches cut off the availability of water throughout the Swamp, diminishing the entire ecological function of the great Cypress Swamp.

Sometime around 1782 lightning caused a fire in the swamp that burned for months. The fire was so large that people as far away as Philadelphia reported seeing the fire glowing at night.

Then again in 1930 after a long drought the swamp was on fire again. This time the fire could have been caused by a moonshine still. The swamp appears to have been a good location for stills during the prohibition years. Due to the large amount of trees that had fallen over the centuries and sunk deep into the swamp and then were covered by moss, the fires burned as far as four feet under ground. This made it impossible for man to put the fire out. They had to depend on rain.

Between almost two hundred years of harvesting trees and the fires, the Bald Cypress and Atlantic White Cedar had all but disappeared from the swamp. Then, unfortunately around 1930 through 1936 the Federal Government started a work program to drain the swamp so it could be farmed. This completely brought an end to the thousands of years old forest. Starting in 1970's the Delaware Wild Lands started returning the Great Cypress Swamp back to its original state by controlling the water and guiding it back into the swampland that the 1930's ditches had drained.

Ditches created in the 1920s and 1930s have fundamentally altered the northern portion of the Great Cypress Swamp by draining soils and causing changes in the plant species and species composition at the Swamp. In an effort to reverse these effects, Delaware Wild Lands installed the first water control structures within the ditch system in the late 1970s. These two structures did not retain adequate water levels and, more recently, they installed six additional water control structures that allow water levels to be maintained throughout the year and even directed to specific projects areas.

Last April Delaware Wild Lands planted nearly 17,000 Atlantic White-cedar trees and several hundred Baldcypress trees as part of the ongoing forest restoration efforts at

**Bald Cypress trees (pictured here) and Atlantic White Cedar trees are making a comeback in the Great Cypress Swamp. More than 65,000 trees have been planted to date in the Swamp as part of the undaunted restoration efforts of Delaware Wild Lands, Inc. The restoration efforts began in 1961.**

continued on page 2