

Wetlands Regulatory Advisory Committee (RAC) DRAFT Procedures for Committee Operations

Adopted by the Wetlands RAC on [DATE]

1. Background

[Senate Bill 9 of the 153rd General Assembly](#) amends [Chapter 66 of Title 7 of the Delaware Code](#), cited as The Wetlands Stewardship Act, to create a State nontidal wetlands program alongside the existing tidal wetlands program. The Act establishes the Wetlands Regulatory Advisory Committee (the “Committee” or the “RAC”) to help the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (“DNREC” or the “Department”) develop the first set of regulations for the new program (7 Del. C. §§ 6621, 6622).¹ The RAC held its first meeting on July 31, 2026. The Act requires the Committee to submit regulations to the Secretary for approval by August 1, 2027 (7 Del. C. § 6621(n)).

Under the Act, DNREC may not put any regulations under this chapter in place until they are first adopted by the Committee, and then by the Secretary (provided they are found to be consistent with Delaware law), and they subsequently go through the State’s rulemaking process. If the Committee does not approve a version and submit it to the Secretary before August 1, 2027, DNREC may write and adopt the initial regulations on its own (7 Del. C. § 6622(c)). After the initial regulations are promulgated, DNREC will have the authority to promulgate subsequent amendments to the initial regulations (7 Del. C. § 6622(d)). DNREC must solicit the Committee’s input on these subsequent amendments before promulgation, and the Committee has 60 days to provide such input.

The Act allows the RAC to adopt rules for its own operation and provides that Robert’s Rules of Order applies wherever those rules are silent (7 Del. C. § 6621(l)). These Procedures are those rules. Nothing in these Procedures is meant to amend the authority granted to the Committee by the Act; to the extent there is a conflict between these Procedures and the Act, the Act controls.

These Procedures specifically cover the Committee’s work on the initial regulations, through their submission to the Secretary before August 1, 2027, and on any revisions to the initial regulations, should the Secretary remand the initial regulations back to the Committee after a finding that they are inconsistent with Delaware law (7 Del. C. § 6622(a)). The Committee may adopt additional procedures covering their work reviewing the first three years of the implementation of the initial regulations following their promulgation (7 Del. C. § 6621(b)); its work on the final report regarding implementation of the initial regulations (7 Del. C. § 6621(o)); and its work providing solicited input to the Secretary should there be subsequent amendments to the regulations (7 Del. C. § 6622(d)).

2. Purpose and Scope

Under the Act, the Committee’s charge is to assist DNREC in developing the initial regulations; review the first three years of how those regulations work in practice; report on that review; and advise the Secretary on other matters related to the wetlands program when asked (7 Del. C. §§ 6621(b), (n), (o), 6622(a)).

The RAC reviews and approves the initial regulations, working with DNREC staff, before they go to the Secretary (7 Del. C. §§ 6621(b), 6622(a)). If the Secretary finds that all or part of them are inconsistent with Delaware law, the Secretary must give a reason and send them back to DNREC staff and the

¹ DNREC had previously promulgated wetland regulations pursuant to its authority under the previous iteration of Chapter 66 of Title 7 of the Delaware Code. These regulations, 7 Del. Admin. C. 7502, are still in effect. The initial set of regulations for the new program, which the RAC has been empowered to assist DNREC to develop, will be amendments to 6 Del. Admin C. 7502.

Committee for revision (7 Del. C. § 6622(a)). If the Secretary finds them consistent with Delaware law, the Secretary promulgates them as the RAC proposed under the procedures of Chapter 101 of Title 29 (*Id.*).

The Act requires the Committee to consider nationally recognized best practices and standards and what surrounding states have done on incentive programs, policies, and regulatory roles (7 Del. C. §§ 6621(c), 6622(b)). The Committee must also examine how state and federal permitting works, with the goals of reducing duplication, providing efficient one-stop permitting, expediting permits for voluntary wetland habitat projects, and accounting accurately for cumulative and individual impacts. *Id.*

The Act also outlines what the initial regulations must cover, including, but not limited to:

- Establishing the Delaware Wetland Screening Tool (7 Del. C. § 6607(b)). The Act permits the Tool to include:
 - Methods for screening whether a wetland is likely or predicted to be present;
 - Methods for confirming or refining that assessment against field conditions, using published criteria;
 - Criteria for evaluating and rating wetland function, including high, moderate, or low function;
 - Criteria for distinguishing between tidal and nontidal wetlands;
 - Criteria for identifying Exceptional Value Wetlands; and
 - Certification and oversight criteria for Department-certified professionals using the Tool on the public's behalf.
 - The Act intends that, apart from a "Presence or Probable Absence Study," onsite screening be doable in under a day with minimal equipment.
- Defining Exceptional Value Wetlands and giving them added protection, including restrictions on allowed activities (7 Del. C. §§ 6603, 6607(d)(4));
- Setting permit application procedures, and the standards for reviewing applications (7 Del. C. § 6607(d));
- Controlling or prohibiting activities on land designated or proposed for designation as wetlands (*Id.*);
- Reducing duplication with Army Corps of Engineers permitting, and where possible, enabling joint or one-stop permitting where jurisdiction overlaps (*Id.*);
- Improving the State's ability to account for cumulative and individual impacts of wetlands permitting actions (*Id.*);
- Setting mitigation strategies aimed at no net overall loss of wetland acreage and function, and structuring any incentives that are part of these mitigation strategies to provide a strong incentive for the preservation of Exceptional Value Wetlands (*Id.*); and
- Establishing General Permits for common or environmentally beneficial low-impact activities with minimal environmental impact (*Id.*).

The RAC is not charged with amending the Act itself, nor can it. The RAC also cannot promulgate regulations that are inconsistent with the Act.

The RAC's role does not end at submission. Once the initial regulations are in place, the Committee reviews DNREC's implementation of them, and the wetlands program overall, for three years, and issues a final report with recommendations for legislative or regulatory improvements within one year after that (7 Del. C. § 6621(o)). Later regulations and amendments to the initial regulations do not need Committee approval, but the Secretary must ask the Committee for input, and the Committee has sixty days to respond (7 Del. C. § 6621(d)).

3. Committee Composition

The Act sets the Committee at 25 members and specifies each seat (7 Del. C. § 6621(d)):

- The County Administrator or County Executive, or their designee, from each county;
- Three members from the Delaware Farm Bureau, one from each county, appointed by the Governor from at least two candidates the Farm Bureau proposes per county;
- One member representing the Conservation Districts whose job requires expertise in stormwater management, appointed by the Governor;
- Eight members from the environmental advocacy community, appointed by the Governor from candidates proposed by: the Delaware Center for Inland Bays, the Delaware Chapter of the Sierra Club, the Delaware Nature Society, the Delaware Ornithological Society, The Delaware Wild Lands, Ducks Unlimited, The Nature Conservancy, and one additional organization the Governor identifies;
- One member from an environmental justice organization the Governor identifies;
- One member each from the Home Builders Association of Delaware, the Delaware Association of Realtors, the American Council of Engineering Companies of Delaware, and the Delmarva Chicken Association, appointed by the Governor from candidates each organization proposes;
- One member from a general business group the Governor identifies;
- One private wetlands consultant, certified by the Society of Wetlands Scientists, with at least 15 years of experience working in the State, appointed by the Governor; and
- Three members from higher education: one faculty member specializing in wetlands science, one in agricultural economics, and one from the University of Delaware Cooperative Extension with knowledge of forestry or soil conservation, appointed by the Governor.

Members appointed by the Governor serve three-year terms and may be reappointed (7 Del. C. § 6621(f)). Someone appointed to a seat vacated mid-term serves only the rest of that term. Members remain after their terms expire until they resign, are reappointed, or are replaced. An organization may replace the member it named at any time. Members are not paid (7 Del. C. § 6621(g)).

DNREC staffs the Committee and is not a member. Vacant seats and alternates do not count toward a quorum. DNREC will keep a current roster of members, designated alternates, and vacant seats, and distribute it to the Committee.

4. Designation of Alternates

These provisions are adopted under the Committee's authority to make rules for its own operation (7 Del. C. § 6621(l)).

All RAC members are encouraged to designate an alternate, in advance of a conflict arising, who can attend meetings if the member is not available. An alternate should represent the same constituency as the member, and seats filled from a named organization should come from that organization.

Apart from designees noted in the Wetland Stewardship Act (7 Del. C. § 6621(d)(1)), an alternate does not have the authority to vote on behalf of the member of the RAC, nor does an alternate's attendance at a meeting count towards a quorum.

RAC members should:

- Name an alternate in writing to DNREC or the Facilitator within 30 days of joining the Committee. A member may change that designation at any time in writing.

- Ensure the alternate is fully briefed on the RAC's process and status prior to the alternate attending a meeting.

While a designated alternate may occupy their RAC member's seat for a given RAC meeting, their presence at a meeting is not considered attendance by the RAC member themselves. As such, RAC Co-Chairs still hold discretion to replace a RAC member who misses two meetings in a row without good cause, as outlined in Section 5 below and in 7 Del. C. § 6621(k). Alternates follow the same responsibilities and code of conduct as members (Sections 5 and 6).

5. Membership Responsibilities

In general, members, or their designated alternates standing in for them, shall:

- Attend all meetings. Under the Act, a member who misses two meetings in a row without good cause is eligible for replacement at the Co-Chairs' discretion (7 Del. C. § 6621(k)).
- Name an alternate under Section 4 and keep that designation current.
- Inform the Facilitator of when they will be absent and arrange for their alternate to attend.
- Come prepared for each meeting, having reviewed the materials for the items on the agenda.
- Communicate on an ongoing basis with members of one's constituency and relevant networks to ensure that preliminary ideas generated, and progress made, by the RAC are disseminated in a timely manner to a broader base of interested stakeholders, and that relevant stakeholder input and perspectives are brought by RAC members to relevant discussions and deliberations.

All RAC members should be prepared to:

- Negotiate in good faith with a commitment to candor, collaboration and achieving consensus where possible, and the goals of the process.
- Operate under the assumption that all written materials, such as emails and documents, are or will be publicly accessible under the Delaware Public Records Law.

6. Membership Code of Conduct and Discussion Ground Rules

In and between meetings, members and alternates are expected to:

- Aim for balanced/inclusive participation, with one person speaking at a time and avoiding interruptions when another is speaking.
- Make every effort to stay on track with the agenda and move the deliberations forward.
- Communicate concerns, interests, and ideas openly.
- Express one's own views rather than speaking for others at the table.
- Be respectful of other participants, including those with whom you may disagree.
- Listen with curiosity, as well as sharing your perspectives and ideas.
- When speaking with others outside the Committee, make clear you are sharing your own views, or your organization's, and not speaking for the Committee as a whole.
- Avoid personal attacks or blame. In the event a discussion becomes personalized, the Facilitator may ask members to refrain, may ask the group to take a break, or may ask an individual to leave the meeting.
- Avoid grandstanding and filibustering so that everyone has a fair chance to contribute. The Facilitator will ask members to hold their comments and allow time for others, as needed.
- Seek to develop collaborative solutions, which includes stating why you may disagree with an idea or proposal and offer alternatives that might meet your own and others' interests.
- Abide by this same conduct when communicating on Committee business by phone, email, or other means.

7. Responsibilities of DNREC

DNREC staffs the Committee but is not a member. The Act requires DNREC to identify the time and place of the first meeting, provide staff to run the Committee, and support it on both regulatory and technical matters. DNREC will consider seriously, and in good faith, the input of the Committee as it develops and makes available draft regulations for RAC discussion and review. Specifically, DNREC will:

- Handle meeting planning, meeting logistics, and any site visits, including meeting space, audiovisual and virtual participation technology, room setup, printed materials, refreshments, and translation and accessibility services.
- Provide staff to support the Committee's deliberations, supply information, conduct research, and develop ideas and options.
- Circulate agendas, background documents, presentations, and draft options at least three business days before each meeting, as practicable.
- Prepare presentations on technical and other relevant issues when the Co-Chairs, the Facilitator, or members ask for them.
- Manage and seek technical input from the National Association of Wetland Managers (NAWM), the technical consultant supporting the effort.
- Identify the boundaries the initial regulations have to work within, including what does and does not fall to the Committee.
- Provide guidance on which regulatory approaches would be unworkable.
- Keep the Committee roster and past agendas, materials, and approved meeting summaries to the DNREC website and the State public meeting calendar.

On developing the rules themselves, DNREC, assisted by its attorneys in the Environmental Unit of the Delaware Department of Justice, will:

- Draft regulatory language for the Committee to review and comment on as its deliberations progress.
- Submit the regulations the Committee approves to the Secretary.
- Work with the Committee to revise the regulations if the Secretary sends any part of them back.
- Promulgate regulations approved by the Committee (and determined to be consistent with Delaware law by the Secretary), including ensuring the formal rulemaking process under Chapter 101 of Title 29 of the Delaware Code is followed (such as the required public comment period and hearing).

8. Role of the Co-Chairs

These provisions are adopted under the Committee's authority to make rules for its own operation (7 Del. C. § 6621(l)).

The Act provides for two Co-Chairs, elected by the Committee at its first meeting. The Co-Chairs are members and keep their right to take part in discussion and to vote. The Co-Chairs will:

- Assist DNREC and the Facilitator with RAC agendas, topics for discussion, and processes that enable consensus building and help the RAC meet its statutory August 1, 2027 deadline.
- Establish subcommittees, if it would assist the RAC in meeting its responsibilities, including helping establish what each is asked to do and determining a RAC member who chairs each.
- Decide whether a member who has missed two meetings in a row without good cause should be eligible for replacement.

- As relevant, and in coordination with the Facilitator, talk with individual members and constituencies to understand differences and possible opportunities to align differing interests toward consensus.

Where a Co-Chair intends to advocate for a position in their role as an individual RAC member, disclose such information to the RAC.

9. Role of the Facilitator

The Committee is supported by a professional facilitator engaged by DNREC, the Consensus Building Institute (CBI). CBI is not a RAC member and has no part in the Committee's decisions. The Facilitator is expected to:

- Develop meeting agendas and meeting summaries and track action items for the RAC.
- Facilitate meetings of the Committee and its Work Groups.
- Support adherence with these Procedures in service of the RAC.
- Identify and summarize where the Committee agrees and where it does not, in order to help the group problem-solve and develop broadly supported approaches. Advocate for a fair, effective, and credible process, while staying completely neutral on the substance and outcome.
- Act as a channel of communication among members, and work with parties between meetings to help address challenges and resolve conflict.
- Work closely with the Co-Chairs on process and consensus building.

10. Role of the Technical Consultant

The Committee will be supported by a third-party technical consultant engaged by DNREC, the National Association of Wetland Manager (NAWM). NAWM is not a RAC member and has no part in the Committee's decisions.

The technical consultant will coordinate with DNREC and CBI to provide the RAC with established scientific data and information that will inform the Committee's deliberations and decision-making. NAWM is expected to draw on its professional knowledge and resources to inform the RAC about nationally recognized best practices and standards; actions that surrounding states have implemented concerning incentive programs, policies, and assumption of regulatory roles; and possible areas of regulatory overlap between state and federal agencies.

11. Work Groups and Technical Expertise

The Act allows the Co-Chairs to create subcommittees ("Work Groups") of the Committee that would help the RAC do its work, and requires that each be chaired by a Committee member. The Act also allows the Committee to invite people with relevant expertise into its discussions. Work Groups operate under the following rules:

- Work Groups are for deliberation, exploring, and generating options. They do not decide anything. Decisions rest with the full Committee.
- The Co-Chairs help establish what each Work Group is asked to do, and the Committee has a chance to review and comment on that charge.
- A Work Group may include people who are not Committee members, as outside expertise is needed.
- Work Group meetings are public meetings and follow Delaware's open meeting requirements. The Co-Chairs will publish each Work Group's full schedule of meeting dates, times, and access information at the start of its work on the State public meeting calendar.

- A scheduled meeting that turns out to be unnecessary will be cancelled, with notice posted. A Work Group will not meet outside its published schedule unless notice is given under Delaware's open meeting requirements.
- Work Groups will ordinarily meet virtually, unless the Work Group decides an in-person or hybrid session is warranted. A physical location will be provided for any member of the public who would like to attend.
- Work Groups will keep a record of their meetings and the key points discussed, posted on the DNREC website, and will report regularly to the Committee on discussions, outcomes, and deliverables.

12. Logistics

- **Meeting Location:** The Committee is expected to hold its meetings at the Kent County Levy Court Administrative Building, 555 Bay Road, Dover, Delaware 19901. Meeting locations may change, as required, to accommodate scheduling conflicts or Committee member participation. Committee members will be notified of any meeting location change, with the location also reflected on the Delaware Public Meeting Calendar. Virtual participation is offered at every meeting. Members taking part virtually count toward a quorum and may vote.
- **Notice of Meetings:** Committee meetings are public meetings and are subject to Delaware's open meeting requirements, which require that public meetings be noticed in advance. Notice and the agenda are posted at least seven days ahead on the State public meeting calendar. Members are also notified by email, as are members of the public subscribed to the relevant DNREC email listserv.
- **Website:** All Committee and Work Group agendas, meeting summaries, and materials will be posted on the DNREC website and meet the State of Delaware Digital Accessibility Policy.
- **Public Comment:** There is time for public comment at every meeting. If no one is present or waiting to speak, the Facilitator, Co-Chairs, or Work Group chair may move on with the agenda. If more people want to speak than the time allows, the Co-Chairs may extend the period or set a time limit per speaker. Written comments may be submitted in person at meetings, with sufficient copies for members where possible; submitted in writing via the virtual meeting platform; or emailed to DNREC_Wetlands_RAC@delaware.gov. Emailed comments will be circulated to members prior to the following Committee meeting.
- **Meeting Summaries:** The Facilitator drafts summaries of which members were present, what was discussed, what was said, what was voted on (including a record, by individual members, of each vote taken and action agreed upon), action items, and next steps. Each draft goes to the Co-Chairs and DNREC, then to Committee members for review, revision, and approval. Approved summaries are posted on the DNREC website.
- **Media:** Members of the media are welcome at all meetings and are expected to be unobtrusive.
- **Recordings:** DNREC will record all Committee and Work Group meetings via Zoom. The Co-Chairs or DNREC will note at the start of each meeting that the session is being recorded.

13. Committee Decision Rule

How many members must be present, and how many must agree, are set by the Act.

- **Quorum:** A quorum, the number who must be present for the Committee to conduct business, is a majority of the Committee's members. Vacant seats do not count. With all 25 seats filled, a quorum is 13 (7 Del. C. § 6621(i)).
- **Official Action:** Unless otherwise indicated in these Procedures, official action, including findings, meeting summaries, recommendations, takes the agreement of a majority of the Committee's members plus one, at a meeting where a quorum (13) is present. For purposes of RAC decision-making, a strict majority plus one will be referred to as a "majority" vote or

approval. If all 25 members are present, majority approval requires 14 “yes” votes (7 Del. C. § 6621(j), 6622(a)).

- **Voting Process:** The initial regulations developed by the RAC will be adopted by majority vote of the entire RAC (25 members) after ample opportunity has been provided to develop a consensus approach to each. Only RAC members may take part in testing consensus or voting. Votes will be recorded in meeting summaries, as required by law. Because the threshold for official action requires a majority of RAC members present and voting, abstaining has the same effect as voting no. Abstentions will be recorded. RAC Members must be present (either virtually or in person) at a decision-making meeting to vote; voting by proxy is not possible. Members are expected to raise and work to address concerns during RAC deliberations and throughout the process, rather than raising objections for the first time during the final vote at the end of the process.
- **Consensus:** The Committee will work toward consensus wherever it can, meaning all or nearly all members can “live with” a proposal, even if it is not someone’s first choice. Consensus is how the Committee achieves a durable result; it is not a substitute for a final vote. Nothing becomes an action of the Committee without a recorded vote meeting the threshold above.

Where the Committee cannot reach agreement on an issue in the course of their deliberations, prior to the final vote, the Facilitator and Co-Chairs will help identify the relevant interests, clarify and narrow the options under consideration, elucidate how the different options address the interests at issue, and work with the RAC to develop a collaborative approach that satisfies the core interests. Where a proposal achieves a majority but not unanimous vote, the Facilitator and Co-Chairs will make sure the stated concerns or perspectives of any member voting against the proposal appear in the meeting summary and in the report that accompanies the initial regulations.

14. Approved Committee Work Products

The Committee will produce and/or adopt the following by consensus (meaning that any outstanding concerns will be addressed before the document is considered final), unless it is explicitly stated below that they will be decided by vote:

- These Procedures for Committee Operations;
- An overall work plan;
- Work Group records and reports;
- [By vote] Interim updates, documents, and recommendations, as appropriate;
- [By vote] The initial regulations, for submission to the Secretary before August 1, 2027; and
- [By vote] A report accompanying the initial regulations, setting out the Committee’s decisions and its reasoning on each significant choice, including options it considered and set aside, minority positions, and what the public said.