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VIDEO:

Nanticoke River Tour Highlights Benefits, Promise, and Challenges

July 25, 2019 – Delaware Governor John Carney, Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control Secretary Shawn M. Garvin, and Division of Fish & Wildlife Director David Saveikis joined State Reps. Danny Short, Tim Dukes, and Jesse Vanderwende to tour the Nanticoke River this week.

All three legislators represent portions of the Nanticoke River Watershed. Rep. Short said he invited the governor on the boat excursion to give him a new perspective on the river's commercial and ecological importance, as well as some of the challenges it faces.

"Seeing the river from a boat gives you a different perspective than what you could get from a map or Google Earth," said Rep. Short, who owned and piloted one of the two boats used.

Between Seaford and the Maryland border, the river transitions from urban and residential uses; to commercial grain, soybean, and aggregate storage and transport; to large tracts of marshes and woodland that may resemble the terrain that greeted the first European explorer, Captain John Smith, in 1608.

"We're trying to have the best of both worlds, developing the commercial while preserving the natural," Rep. Short said.

State Rep. Jesse Vanderwende said river access is a "big deal" for cost-conscious Sussex County farmers and poultry growers. He said a large Perdue grain and soybean transfer facility on the river near Seaford provides a convenient outlet for local crops, taking advantage of inexpensive barge transport. "It's a lot cheaper than having to move every bushel by truck," he said.

Just a short distance downstream are thousands of acres of protected forest and marshland. Fish & Wildlife Director David Saveikis said there are collectively 4,600 acres of state wildlife areas on both banks of the river starting around Woodland and continuing westward.

The agency also operates a secluded American Shad hatchery along the waterway. "We're making progress restoring the population, but it is not yet to the point where it can sustain a recreational fishery," Mr. Saveikis said.

Those efforts could be jeopardized by the arrival of two invasive species: the snakehead and the blue catfish. The latter species, which can top 100 pounds, was intentionally introduced in Virginia's James River in the 1970s and has since made its way to other Chesapeake Bay watersheds.

"I don't know of any other river quite like the Nanticoke," said State Rep. Tim Dukes, who lives along Broad Creek, a major tributary. "This waterway is just breath-taking. It is haven for wildlife and it's part of our historical heritage and cultural landscape."