



Upper Delaware Council

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UPPER DELAWARE COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

January 8, 2026

The Upper Delaware Council held its monthly meeting on Thursday, January 8, 2026. Chairperson Rodgers called the meeting to order at 6:31 p.m. Roll call followed reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

Attendees:

Town of Fremont- Jim Rodgers, Town of Cohecton- Larry Richardson, Town of Delaware- Harold Roeder, Town of Tusten- Evan Padua, Town of Deerpark- Ginny Dudko, Town of Highland- Christine Martin (Zoom), Damascus Township- Jeff Dexter, Lackawaxen Township- Doug Case, Shohola Township- Aaron Robinson, National Park Service- Lindsey Kurnath (Zoom), Delaware River Basin Commission- Beth Brown (Zoom), New York State- Ryan Coulter, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania- Tim Dugan (Zoom)

Absent:

Town of Hancock- Katt Judd, Town of Lumberland- Nadia Rajs, Westfall Township- Michael Barth

Staff:

Executive Director- Laurie Ramie, Resource & Land Use Specialist- Kerry Engelhardt, Administrative Support- Stephanie Driscoll

Media:

Tri-County Independent- Peter Becker (Zoom), River Reporter- Liam Mayo

Guests:

Town of Deerpark- Bill Dudko, Town of Tusten- Cathleen Breen, Town of Highland- Michael Keller (Zoom)

Election of 2026 Officers by Ballot Vote: A ballot was provided to absentees and virtual participants in advance. After counting the votes, Ramie announced that Jeffrey Dexter (Damascus Township) has been unanimously elected 2026 UDC Chairperson, Evan Padua (Town of Tusten) elected UDC Vice-chairperson, and Al Henry (Berlin Township) elected UDC Secretary-Treasurer with 13 votes cast.

Approval of December 6, 2025 Minutes: A motion by Richardson seconded by G. Dudko to approve the December 6, 2025 meeting minutes carried, with Dugan and Rodgers abstaining.

Public Comment on the Agenda: None.

Committee Reports: There were no questions regarding previously distributed minutes for Water Use/Resource Management 12/16 (Evan Padua), Operations 12/16 (Jim Rodgers), or Project Review 12/16 (Larry Richardson).

Status Reports:

Delaware River Basin Commission: Brown wished the council a Happy New Year. The most recent hydrologic conditions are included in the meeting packet. She reported that a public hearing is scheduled for February 4th, for which she will serve as the hearing officer, that will include docket applications, renewals, and any regulatory changes that require public comment. The hearing agenda will be posted at least ten days in advance. That public hearing will be followed by DRBC's first-quarter business meeting on March 4th. Both meetings will be held virtually. The DRBC has three advisory committee meetings scheduled early in the year, all of which will also be virtual. The Toxics Advisory Committee will meet on Wednesday, January 21st, followed by the Water Management Advisory Committee on Wednesday, February 11th, and the Advisory Committee on Climate Change on Tuesday, February 17th. All three committees currently have openings, and she encouraged interested individuals to consider applying.

Brown referenced a conversation she had seen in the minutes from one of the prior month's committee meetings regarding AI data centers. The DRBC is very interested in this topic from a water resources perspective and staff have been doing a significant amount of learning to better understand this rapidly evolving area. This includes tracking developments from both

technological and policy standpoints. Currently, there is considerable legislative and policy activity related to AI data centers in Pennsylvania, with some activity in New York as well, although DRBC's efforts to date have primarily focused on Pennsylvania. Staff have been monitoring potential AI data center projects that could eventually require DRBC permits, as well as projects that may be large enough to have significant regional impacts even if they are not yet formally before the Commission. DRBC staff would be happy to provide an overview of the information they have been tracking, either as part of a public meeting presentation or through more individualized discussions, depending on what would be most helpful. Martin commented that she would very much appreciate such an update and expressed personal interest in hearing more.

NYS Dept. of Environmental Conservation: Coulter said within the fisheries office there was one topic generating a lot of activity and phone calls: ice fishing season. With consistently cold conditions up until today, staff have been fielding frequent calls from the public asking about ice conditions and where it might be safe to go. Information has been provided as best as possible. He said ice fishing is a great way to spend time with family and friends, allowing people to get out together without needing a boat or even shoreline access and can be a fun and productive way to fish. While ice conditions had been solid earlier, warming temperatures can make shorelines soft and unstable, and people were urged to be careful, especially when accessing the ice from shore.

Beyond seasonal recreation, fisheries staff are already busy with internal planning. Work is underway on upcoming outreach events, fisheries surveys, and the range of other routine activities that make up their annual workload. Fishing access along the corridor continues to be a major focus for this year. Coulter encouraged members to flag any issues or concerns as they arise.

G. Dudko asked if there have been any deer-kill reports yet. Coulter said no reports had been released so far, with the expectation that those numbers would likely become available in the coming months. Some late deer seasons are still ongoing.

Pennsylvania Dept. of Conservation and National Resources: Dugan reported that as Pennsylvania moves into 2026, one of the major topics occupying DCNR and many partner agencies statewide is America250, the upcoming commemoration of the country's 250th anniversary. The DCNR and its partners anticipate hosting a variety of events and dedications throughout the year, which will require significant staff time and resources as agencies take part in celebrating the milestone. Pennsylvania will also be hosting the NFL Draft this year, which will take place at Point State Park in the Pittsburgh area. Because of that, a great deal of activity will be centered on DCNR-managed lands. While this will not have a direct impact on the Upper Delaware region, he wanted the Council to be aware that DCNR staff will be stretched across multiple high-profile events and locations throughout the year as planning and logistics ramp up.

Dugan reported that Pennsylvania is currently in its late deer season, which runs from after Christmas through the end of January. While the traditional late archery season and flintlock season remain unchanged, there is a notable adjustment this year within DMAP (Deer Management Assistance Program) areas. Hunters holding DMAP permits are now able to participate in an extended antlerless deer season using rifles within those designated units. As a result, DCNR is seeing increased participation and activity in state forests, as the Pennsylvania Game Commission has effectively created additional opportunities for hunters across the region. The area experienced some solid ice and snow earlier in the season, though conditions are now warming and staff are waiting to see how that will change things. When the snowmobile season opened shortly after the close of the regular deer rifle season, there was enough ice pack to allow for limited riding. State forest roads had a firm base of two to three inches of snow and ice, supplemented by a few small snow events. This created a short window where snowmobilers could get out without damaging trails or equipment. In addition to snowmobiling, staff observed people cross-country skiing and snowshoeing on state forest and state park lands throughout northeastern Pennsylvania. This activity began surprisingly early, starting just after Thanksgiving following the first snowfall, even while the regular deer season was still underway. It was encouraging to see people taking advantage of winter recreation opportunities.

Dugan heard that ice anglers were having fairly good success on both public and private lakes and ponds, with ice thickness generally in the range of six to eight inches in many areas, and sometimes more. Conditions had been good but he cautioned that with the current warm-up, everyone is waiting to see how the ice holds. He emphasized the importance of safety and encouraged caution whenever cold weather returns and ice conditions fluctuate.

Dugan reminded everyone that Pennsylvania fishing licenses run on a calendar-year basis. With 2026 underway, anyone planning to fish in Pennsylvania should be sure to obtain a current license before heading out.

He shared an announcement on behalf of his colleague Christine Dettore regarding DCNR grants: DCNR grant programs are currently open, including the Community Conservation Partnerships Program (C2P2) grants. These are available to nonprofits, land trusts, and municipalities, with applications accepted through April so he strongly encourages anyone considering applying, or anyone who knows a potential applicant, to reach out to Dettore in advance. As the regional representative, she can provide guidance on applications and help discuss potential projects before submission.

While avian flu has not been detected in the immediate Upper Delaware region, cases have appeared just to the south. Recent cold fronts and winter weather have brought large flocks of snow geese into the region, particularly south of the Appalachian Trail. These flocks, sometimes numbering between 3,000 and 5,000 birds, have shown some limited impacts from avian flu in areas such as the Lehigh Valley and Berks County, around the Reading area. DCNR and partner agencies are monitoring the situation closely and hoping that it does not escalate.

Dugan concluded his report by addressing a question that has been circulating recently regarding a potential merger between the Pennsylvania Game Commission and the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission. He confirmed that the discussion is real and that several news articles and legislative proposals have been introduced, including House Bill 746. Pennsylvania is unique in having two separate agencies managing wildlife and fisheries, whereas every other state combines those responsibilities into a single agency. With more than 220 years of institutional history behind both commissions, the idea is significant, but he noted that the initial focus appears to be on whether merging administrative and overhead functions could improve efficiency rather than immediately restructuring field operations. Based on what he has heard from colleagues, conservation officers, biologists, and managers within both commissions, he believes the concept does make sense in some respects, though many details remain undefined. This is an active conversation and something agencies are watching closely as it evolves. There is no discussion at this time about DCNR being included in any such merger. DCNR is a separate executive branch department under the Governor, with distinct founding legislation and funding streams from the two commissions.

National Park Service: The NPS monthly activity report is included in the packet. Kurnath described this time of year as very much a “rebooting” period following the holidays, with emphasis on planning and internal coordination. NPS staff are currently working on both their 2025 annual report and their 2026 work plan, which they intend to share with the Council. The target is to have those materials ready for the March full Council meeting. In addition to routine planning, the NPS is in the middle of its annual process for submitting requests for targeted investments. These requests are intended to support projects that fall outside what NPS can typically fund through its standard congressional appropriations.

Kurnath highlighted that 2026 Eagle Watch weekends are underway. The first took place the previous weekend and the program will continue through February 22nd. Eagle Watch events are held on Saturdays and Sundays at the Zane Grey Museum (and other locations).

Kurnath shared that Law Enforcement Ranger Ron Babus has left UPDE to take a position with another federal agency; his last day with NPS was December 18th. They are currently in the process of hiring seasonal staff for the upcoming year and that will hopefully fill the gap until they can hire more permanent Law Enforcement Rangers.

Kurnath said that NPS has issued another Special Use Permit to PennDOT to allow for the removal of additional Skinners Falls-Milanville Bridge debris that may still be in the river. The permit was issued in late 2025 and allows PennDOT through the month of March to attempt to remove any remaining debris. NYS DOT received a Special Use Permit to inspect the Kellams-Stalker Bridge.

Rodgers asked whether the vacant law enforcement position would be filled. Kurnath said that replacing the position is the goal and that there is currently a strong administrative priority within the NPS to keep law enforcement ranger and park police positions staffed. There are targeted recruitment efforts underway, but the outcome will depend on how the hiring process unfolds. In the meantime, Chief Ranger Keith Winslow and others are continuing to pursue additional seasonal staff to help cover any gaps. The park unit should have adequate staffing in place for the summer.

UDC Executive Director: Ramie congratulated Dexter on being elected 2026 UDC Chairperson and said that the formal swearing-in ceremony will take place next month (2/5), after all towns and townships complete their

reorganizational meetings to make sure there aren't any changes to the UDC roster of representatives and alternates. Next month's meeting will also include a reception with cake, along with the annual group portrait taken. Ramie shared that toward the end of last year, we were running very low on the UDC lapel pins that are often given to presenters. The last bulk order had been 100 pins purchased in 2017 that lasted until now. Instead of ordering again through the same Florida-based mail order company used in 2017, they wanted to find a local vendor. She thanked Driscoll for researching options and locating Spencer Printing in Honesdale, which was able to produce the pins customized with the UDC logo. The new order of 100 pins has arrived, slightly different from the prior version, though they still feature the familiar "land, water, people" logo. She invited members to take one of the new pins, and she said anyone attending remotely would receive one the next time they meet in person.

UDC delegate appointments/membership forms for 2026 were sent out to each town, township, and state. Returning those forms is how each jurisdiction confirms whether there are changes for the coming year. She reported two membership updates as of now. First, she announced a new alternate for the Town of Highland who was joining remotely, Michael Keller of Barryville, and invited him to introduce himself. Keller thanked the group and said he looked forward to meeting everyone in person as soon as possible. He lives about a mile off the river and is genuinely interested in becoming more involved and learning what is happening up and down the corridor. His background includes natural resource management, cartography, and landscape management, spanning roughly 15 to 20 years, and he has also done some environmental and natural resource writing. He was trained as a journalist and hoped that experience would allow him to contribute meaningfully to discussions, even as he learns more. Ramie welcomed him and noted that he is succeeding Supervisor John Pizzolato as alternate. The second membership change she noted is in Town of Fremont: the alternate seat previously held by Jim Greier is now vacant. She said she was not sure whether the town would seek a replacement. Whenever there are incoming or outgoing members, the office prepares and sends orientation folders to new members and appreciation letters to departing members to recognize their dates of service.

Ramie said that UDC staff are reviewing whether there are updated resources available for NYS's Sexual Harassment Prevention Training this year or whether they will need to use the same Department of Labor training video that has been in place since the requirement began. Either way, we will have a resolution on a future agenda to recommit to our policy and describe how the UDC will meet the training requirements. If anyone completes training elsewhere, they can simply provide evidence of that to satisfy the requirement.

Ramie reported that she filed UDC's Pennsylvania Business Annual Report yesterday. In 2025 the Pennsylvania Department of State implemented a new requirement for all corporations—both for-profit businesses and nonprofits—to file and register so the state can confirm the entity is still active. While the process itself is simple, the consequences for failing to file are not, noting that the notice warns of administrative dissolution, termination, cancellation of registration, and loss of name protection. The UDC learned last year that the requirement applies even though UDC is a 501(c)(3), because UDC is incorporated in Pennsylvania (dating back to 1988) and holds a certificate to do business in New York, making it truly a bi-state organization. The filing window runs from January 1 through June 30. She will also start working on the Federal Financial Report (FFR) and the Performance Progress Report (PPR) for the 2025 calendar year. Both are due through GrantSolutions by March 31 to the NPS.

The IRS has set the 2026 business travel reimbursement rate and it has increased by 2.5 cents. Ramie said the current rate is 72.5 cents per mile, and members will see the adjustment reflected in their reimbursement checks.

Ramie reported that on December 29, the NPS officially approved UDC's Application for Federal Assistance to extend the Cooperative Agreement for another year, covering the 2026 calendar year. However, at the time of approval, the funding associated with that agreement was still uncertain because the NPS is operating under a Continuing Resolution through the end of February at 33.42% budget levels. She said she expected that would impact NPS's ability to fully fund UDC right away. She credited UPDE's Administrative Officer Tara Harbert with keeping UDC informed throughout the process. Harbert had multiple meetings with the Regional Comptroller and others to explore whether full funding could still be secured. Partial or restricted funding would have forced UDC to operate on interim periods—requiring repeated paperwork and additional applications—so Ramie expressed significant relief in being able to avoid that scenario. Due to advocacy from Harbert, Kurnath, Marshall, as the Agreements Technical Representative, the NPS agreed to provide the full \$300,000. She checked the UDC's ASAP account as of January 1 and confirmed the funds had been wired and are now available for monthly drawdowns of federal expenses. She expressed hope that the NPS would receive its full funding sooner rather than later.

Ramie offered congratulations to Nadia Rajs, the UDC's Town of Lumberland representative, who has been re-elected as Chairperson of the Sullivan County Legislature. This role carries significant additional responsibility and public service demands. She also highlighted that Vice Chair Evan Padua has a new column debuting in the *River Reporter*. Padua explained that the column is called "Step Outside," describing it as an outdoors-focused column that will not be exclusively about fishing. There are already other outdoor writers in the publication covering topics like fly fishing and farming, and his column will be more of an overview of outdoor activities in the region. He shared that since he stopped doing his radio show with Radio Catskill, he had some extra time and felt this was a good way to contribute.

She also relayed recent announcements from Pennsylvania Senators Lisa Baker and Rosemary Brown and Representatives Jonathan Fritz and Jeff Olsommer regarding local funding awards. Damascus Township will receive \$212,968 for improvements at the Township Park, which she noted had previously been recognized by the UDC with an Outstanding Community Achievement Award for its growth and development. Lackawaxen Township received \$220,000 to acquire and renovate a fire tower. Engelhardt said that the fire tower will be placed near the township hall by the park as an attraction rather than serving as a functioning fire tower.

Ramie referenced the letter the Council approved the previous month to the 13 local government members requesting consideration of stopgap support considering two consecutive deficit budgets. She thanked the representatives who have been presenting that request to their town and township boards, either already or as upcoming meeting agendas allow. The request has generated some positive pledges. While the Council does not yet have funds "in hand," she said several municipalities do intend to contribute the requested \$1,000. She will keep a running tally and report back as contributions are received. When the 2026 budget was finalized, UDC had to zero out several categories of activities that are typically supported—specifically noting as one example that River and Shoreline Cleanup grants are not happening at this time unless alternative funding can be secured. She said that once stopgap support is received, the Council will need to discuss how best to allocate it, and she noted that it will not be difficult to identify needs. The core issue is operating expenses exceeding federal income currently, meaning the shortfall is largely tied to basic operations.

She is actively drafting a press release to recognize the individual donations received during 2025. The most recent donation came from Bill and Ginny Dudko on December 29, dedicated in memory of G. Dudko's father, Lew Smalzle, a former Town of Highland UDC representative. She thanked them for the gesture. She reminded members that the largest contribution received last year of \$25,000 came from a charitable trust and that this donation enabled UDC to purchase computers to ensure compatibility with Windows 11 and improve overall office functionality.

On that technology front, she reported that the purchase and installation of the new equipment has been completed. Kristt Kelly Office Systems of Monticello is now providing IT support services and has been excellent to work with. The bill has been paid, and staff are working through final checks to ensure all software is functioning properly and that the office has what it needs moving forward. The program historically used to create the newsletter, design forms, and annual reports does not work with Windows 11, and there are also complications because the printer the Council uses has not switched to Windows 11. As a result, UDC will need to transition to a new design program. An old computer tower was intentionally retained because it contains QuarkXPress, and without it, the office cannot open files created in that format.

Ramie mentioned a recent issue with UDC's main phone line. Staff were alerted that the primary line (252-3022) sometimes does not ring or indicate an incoming call and instead routes callers directly to voicemail, even when staff are sitting right next to the phone. She said it happens intermittently. They have contacted Frontier Communications, who was able to see that a problem exists and is now working to fix it. She noted that UDC has additional lines, including one that is technically a fax line (252-3359) if needed. She reassured members and the public that if calls aren't answered, it may simply be because staff aren't aware the phone is ringing, she expressed hope that the issue will be resolved quickly.

Ramie directed members to the calendars included in the packets for this month and next. She said there are not yet specific presentations scheduled for 2026, but the office has sent out multiple invitations for topics they believe will be of interest and they are waiting for responses and firm dates. She also mentioned that Dexter has invited someone to serve as the officiant for February 5.

In terms of the UDC's annual signature events, she announced that the 6th Annual Upper Delaware Litter Sweep will take place throughout the entire month of April, giving participants flexibility to organize cleanups whenever it fits their schedules. The 38th Annual Family Raft Trip will be held on the first Sunday in August, August 2, and the specific river segment for the trip will be determined later. She also discussed planning for the 38th Annual River Valley Awards Banquet, noting that she is considering holding it on the third Sunday in September—September 20—rather than the fourth Sunday that weekend, such as the Delaware Valley Arts Alliance's Big Eddy Film Festival (running Thursday through Sunday) and America 250-related open house weekends at historic sites throughout Wayne and Pike Counties and beyond, organized in part through the Local History Roundtable in Pennsylvania. She asked members to let her know, before the Operations Committee meeting, if anyone is aware of additional conflicts in September on Sundays. Banquet planning, including brainstorming keynote speaker ideas, will continue at the 1/27 Operations Committee. She added that assuming the Council is still comfortable with its centrally located venue, she ask Central House Family Resort in Beach Lake for further available dates.

New Business:

- a. **Resolution 2026-01: Signatories for Bank Accounts in 2026:** A motion by Henry to approve Resolution 2025-01 to authorize signatories for the UDC bank accounts in 2026, seconded by Robinson, carried.
- b. **Resolution 2026-02: Enter Into a Contract With Eckersley & Davis LLP for the Upper Delaware Council's Fiscal Year 2026 Financial Review:** A motion by Henry, seconded by Robinson, to enter into a contract with Eckersley and Davis LLP for the UDC's Fiscal Year 2026 Financial Review, carried.
- c. **Resolution 2026-03: Adopting a Whistleblower Protection Policy:** A motion by Henry to adopt a Whistleblower Protection Policy, seconded by Robinson, carried.
- d. **Draft Letter to NPS: Sorochynskij Dog Kennel (2025-08), Damascus Township:** Engelhardt said this comes from the Project Review Committee, who passed a motion to send it to the full council. A motion by Henry to send a letter recommending substantial conformance to the River Management Plan Land and Water Use Guidelines for the Sorochynskij Dog Kennel in Damascus Township to the National Park Service, seconded by Padua, carried.
- e. **2026 UDC Committee and Subcommittee Memberships:** A memo is included in the packet on committee and subcommittee membership information. Ramie said if anyone wishes to join or leave a committee, please let UDC staff know so we can establish a quorum before the next meetings in January. Besides the WU/RM Committee, Project Review Committee, and Operations Committee, the UDC also has the Personnel Subcommittee. Both UDC representatives or alternates can serve on committees. Election of Chairs and Vice-chairs for each committee will be done at the January meetings as well.
- f. **Annual Conflict of Interest Disclosure Statements:** UDC board members were asked to complete the Conflict-of-Interest Disclosure Statement and return it to Driscoll at their earliest convenience.
- g. **Other:** None.

Old Business:

- a. **NPS Determination: UDC 2025-04- Golden Horde Farm and Campground, Town of Cocheton:** Engelhardt said the letter concurring with the UDC's finding of substantial conformance for the Golden Horde Farm and Campground is included in tonight's packet. Henry asked if the applicant is going to take down the yurts in the off season as suggested? Engelhardt said she isn't sure. That wasn't a requirement, just a suggestion. Henry asked why we suggested that to begin with? Engelhardt said it's more of a potential visual eyesore situation.
- b. **Other:** None.

Public Comment: None.

Adjournment: A motion by Roeder seconded by Henry to adjourn the meeting at 7:22 p.m. carried.

Minutes prepared by Stephanie Driscoll, 1/15/2026