## Spanning the Gap



U.S. Dept. of the Interior National Park Service

**A Balancing Act** 

Spanning the Gap
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Delaware Water Gap National
Recreation Area
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## By Nicole Voigt

The Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area is known for its geology, forests, waterfalls, river valley, and rural landscapes. It is a park that has a "lived-in" look. Take an even closer look and you will find bountiful ecosystems that contain abundant water and amazing plants and animals The Delaware River is one of the last free-flowing rivers in the Eastern United States. Within the recreation area, approximately 40 streams feed the river and over 700 lakes, ponds, and wetlands influence the landscape. Park waters support high quality sport fisheries. Wetlands support diverse wildlife, "clean" surface water, and reduce the severity of floods by acting as sponges to hold runoff. Park biologists routinely monitor the Delaware River and its tributaries to ensure long-term maintenance of our high quality waters.

Park managers protect plant and animal species that are listed by federal and state governments as needing increased protection. Such species of concern may be rare, threatened, or endangered. To date, species of concern in the park number 48 plants and 89 animals! Protecting that habitat of these species is fundamental to their survival and recovery. Within the recreation area, 112 sites containing rare plants and animals have been identified, and new sites are located every year! The biological balance of such communities may be disturbed as species disappear.



Oriental Bittersweet.



Ailanthus altissima (Tree of Heaven) at Bushkill Access PA.



A landscape of purple loosestrife, Japanese knotweed, and Tree of

Species of concern are not the only living organisms getting the attention of park staff. Exotics are nonnative species that now live where they have not historically occurred. To date, 241 exotic plant species and 28 exotic animal species have been found in the recreation area. Harmful exotics aggressively compete for habitat with unprepared species. Most exotics have no natural enemies, for example; purple-loose-strife is a hearty, aggressive exotic which threatens the balance of wetland communities such as those on the banks of the Delaware River. The *Hemlock woolly adelgid* is an exotic insect which feeds on the sap of Eastern Hemlock trees. If the hemlocks die, we will lose the beautiful, cool, and diverse hemlock ravine ecosystems.

Balancing long-term conservation of natural resources with visitor use poses a challenge. Balancing long-term conservation of natural resources with visitor use poses a challenge of natural resources with visitor use. Our park biologists are leaders in a region-wide effort to gain understanding of the hemlock ecosystem and the impact of the edelgid. Your cooperation with park rules and posted restrictions is an important part of maintaining a balance and is very much appreciated. Endless places for viewing natural resources are available. Picnic and recreational sites, river accesses, extensive trails, or the view from a canoe are ideal places for viewing wildlife and a mosaic of landscapes. So take a closer look at the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area and enjoy our natural heritage.

Heaven at Kittatinny Point Visitor Center NJ.



Purple loosestrife along the river.



Phragmites.

(NPS Photos by Larry Hilaire except top photo of adelgid)

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