

IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
June 20, 2013

Contact: Bob Considine (609) 984-1795  
Lawrence Ragonese (609) 292-2994  
Lawrence Hajna (609) 984-1795

CHRISTIE ADMINISTRATION RESTORES SUMMER NATURE PROGRAMS AT ISLAND BEACH AS  
STATE PARK CONTINUES POST-SANDY RECOVERY

(13/P66) TRENTON - Island Beach State Park, one of the most popular destinations in the state park system, is offering a full raft of nature programs this summer as the park continues to progress toward full reopening of all beaches and facilities following Superstorm Sandy.

"Restoration of these programs is yet another sign of the great progress the Christie Administration has made in moving our state forward after the devastation of Sandy," said Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Commissioner Bob Martin. "The team at Island Beach State Park must be commended for their dedication to restoring this incredible venue, which is one of the most popular state parks in New Jersey."

"If you love Island Beach State Park, and who doesn't, I strongly encourage you to come on down and enjoy some of our family favorites, such as dragging a seine net in Barnegat Bay or exploring dune wildlife, or trying our newest offering, Harvest the Bay, which introduces visitors to clamming, crabbing and fishing," said State Park Service Director Mark Texel.

Shaped by storms and tides, Island Beach State Park is a narrow barrier island stretching for 10 miles between the ocean and Barnegat Bay. It is one of New Jersey's last significant remnants of a barrier island ecosystem and is one of the few remaining undeveloped barrier beaches on the north Atlantic coast.

The park is continuing to work on rebuilding four beach access boardwalks with the goal of having the park fully operational for the peak summer season. Two of the boardwalks were completed by Memorial Day, and the remaining two are expected to reach completion by the Fourth of July holiday.

While many flock to Island Beach for its excellent swimming and fishing opportunities, there is a wilder side of the park that offers opportunities for deepening the visitor's appreciation of wildlife and the ecosystems they depend on. In recognition of this fact, the State Park Service continues to expand its nature programs that focus on the plants and wildlife that have adapted to the harsh barrier island ecosystem.

Past favorites, free with paid admission, are daily programs that delve into the state's growing population of ospreys, a coastal predator that is an indicator of good environmental health; allow visitors to pull a seine net through Barnegat Bay; provide insights into the plants and animals of a dune system; and explore the watery domain of indigenous fish in tanks at the Pavilion.

Island Beach State Park is also offering guided programs led by an expert team of naturalists. Pre-registration is required for these guided programs, and may be obtained by calling the park office at (732) 793-0506 or by visiting

[www.conservewildlifenj.org](http://www.conservewildlifenj.org). Visitors will be able to explore the park beyond the beach through these interactive and educational programs, which include kayaking tours (equipment provided), fishing lessons, and the popular WILDCHILD programs for kids.

Tours of Barnegat Bay and Sedge Islands are enhanced by the Birding by Kayak, Sedge Islands "Then and Now" Kayak Tour, and Sunset Paddle excursion options. Park Natural Educators will also offer a Beginner's Surf Fishing Clinic, where visitors can learn the basic techniques for successful surf fishing. Bait and equipment are provided.

The WILDCHILD Programs include a hands-on course for toddlers, an "Island Explorers" unit for older children, and the WILDCHILD Surfing Safari, in which children from 8 to 17 learn not only about waves and how they are made, but also how to surf them.

Trail hikes and guided walks return for the summer season as well, which will also require pre-registration. The Moonlight Hike allows visitors the opportunity to see the park from a completely new perspective - at nighttime. This hike gives special attention to the more nocturnal residents of the park. Bonfire, marshmallows, and ghost stories are included.

The Time-Travel Trail Hike offers a historical take on the Park, as hikers learn about the people who lived there long ago. A hike geared towards birdwatchers, bird aficionados, and the curious alike gives hikers the chance to see osprey, herons, warblers, and cormorants among the other feathered inhabitants of the park. The Island Eco-Hike provides a glance at the diverse habitats and creatures of the barrier island ecosystem.

The newest editions to the summer programs at Island Beach State Park are the widely-anticipated Harvest the Bay Educational Programs, where participants will be able to engage in popular Jersey Shore pastimes like clamming, crabbing, and fishing.

Harvest the Bay combines seaside recreational enjoyment with active support of commercial industry and local food resources. Park Natural Educators will join visitors as they explore clams, crabs, and fish, their role in the Barnegat Bay ecosystem, and how they are impacted by the health of the bay. Afterward, participants will learn proper techniques for harvesting these creatures. The Harvest the Bay education programs are made possible through a generous grant from Barnegat Bay Partnership, which will also include implementation of the programs in Spanish.

The Barnegat Bay Partnership also funds the 'Harvest the Bay Day' Festival: A Celebration of Barnegat Bay's Natural Resources. Fresh local seafood, hands-on activities, and nature programs are the star of the show, which will take place on three different dates: July 23rd, August 20th, and October 12th, extending Jersey Shore summer fun well into autumn.

For more information on Island Beach State Park, visit:

<http://www.state.nj.us/dep/parksandforests/parks/island.html>

To get even more out of your getaway planning, the DEP offers Pocket Ranger, a free mobile phone application that provides a wealth of useful information about the state's parks, forests, historic sites and wildlife management areas. The application is available for both Apple and Android mobile devices. Visit [www.StateParkApps.com](http://www.StateParkApps.com) for more information.

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