

Trenton, NJ - The Christie Administration announced today that Island Beach State Park, one of the most popular destinations in the New Jersey State Park System, is now partially reopened for walking, sport fishing and four-wheel driving after cleanup from damages caused by Superstorm Sandy.

"This partial reopening of Island Beach State Park is an important benchmark in the state's recovery from Sandy," said Governor Christie. "While there is still much work to be done, we know that having even partial access to the park is important to residents and visitors and we are thrilled to welcome them back."

Public access to Island Beach State Park is now possible with the recent reopening of Route 35 in Seaside Park. Entry to the park during this initial reopening phase is free.

"I am proud of the hard work undertaken by our staff, volunteers and contractors who have been getting the job done despite very challenging conditions that included lack of utilities, extensive damage to park infrastructure and road closures," said Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Commissioner Bob Martin. "It's also important to note that we have now reopened all of our state parks, though cleanup and restoration work at some of our parks is not yet fully completed."

Ocean Bathing Area 1 is now open for walking and vehicle beach access following removal of debris and cleanup of sand. Ocean Bathing Area 1, traditionally one of the most popular areas at Island Beach, is located four miles south of the entrance to the park.

Four-wheel drive vehicles with park-issued permits may now enter the beach at Ocean Bathing Area 1 or at Gillikin's Road, which is 1.2 miles north of Ocean Bathing Area 1. Horseback riding is not permitted at this time.

All points south of Ocean Bathing Area 1 - including Ocean Bathing Area 2, the Forked River Interpretive Center, the nature center, and access points to Sedge Island - will reopen as cleanup and restoration work progresses. The State Park System is marking every effort to be fully operational for the 2013 peak summer visitor season.

While restroom facilities are not operational as they are winterized annually, portable comfort stations are available in the Ocean Bathing Area 1 parking lot. Air stations for four-wheel drive vehicles are also operable at the Park Administration Office parking lot, allowing owners of these vehicles to inflate their tires again after driving on the beach.

"Many people who love the beauty and tranquility of Island Beach have been eagerly waiting for the park to open," said Richard Boornazian, Assistant Commissioner for Natural and Historic Resources. "As residents and visitors return to our barrier islands, it's comforting to know that this park is available again for recreation and relaxation."

Island Beach State Park sustained considerable damage when Sandy hit New Jersey on October 29. In addition to the loss of electric and gas utilities, dunes were breached at certain beach access paths along the nearly 10-mile length of the park, leaving piles of sand as tall as seven feet high along portions of Shore Road, the main artery through the park.

Boardwalks and lifeguard towers at the park's two main bathing areas were severely damaged or destroyed. Fisherman's Walkway boardwalk at the A-7 access

point was destroyed. The storm also caused wind or water damage to several buildings, as well as the loss of signs and fencing.

At the northern end of the park, the gatehouse and maintenance buildings sustained flooding and structural damage. The jetty at Barnegat Inlet at the most southern end of Island Beach State Park also was compromised.

Despite all of the damage, great progress has been made. Debris cleanup by Island Beach State Park staff and the New Jersey State Park Service in partnership with volunteer groups and other partnerships has resulted in restoration of habitable beach areas.

On January 19, hundreds of volunteers hauled Christmas trees to the park that were used to help restore dunes, with delivery of more trees tentatively scheduled February 2 and February 16.

"Just as our active and reliable partnerships are important to us during good times, they are even more important in times of need," said Island Beach State Park Manager Ray Bukowski. "A great deal of credit has to go to our partners who care so much for this special place, including Friends of Island Beach State Park, the New Jersey Beach Buggy Association, Clean Ocean Action, the Surfrider Foundation and Waste Management of New Jersey."

Due to the closure of Island Beach State Park, the Division of Parks and Forestry has extended the 2012 Island Beach State Park Mobile Sport Fishing Permits until March 31, 2013. The 2013 Mobile Sport Fishing Permits cannot currently be purchased at Island Beach State Park. They can be secured via mail or at the Trenton Central Office of the State Park Service.

For an application for a Mobile Sport Fishing Vehicle Annual Permit, please visit:
http://www.state.nj.us/dep/parksandforests/parks/docs/island_beach_permit%20revised%2012-12.pdf

For more on Island Beach State Park visit
<http://www.state.nj.us/dep/parksandforests/parks/island.html> or
<http://www.nj.gov/dep/daw/islandbeach/>

For more on New Jersey's State Parks, Forests and Historic Sites, please visit: <http://www.state.nj.us/dep/parksandforests/index.html>