

CHRISTIE ADMINISTRATION ANNOUNCES POPULAR ISLAND BEACH STATE PARK NATURE PROGRAMS TO BEGIN TOURING FOLLOWING SUPERSTORM SANDY

Interpretive Touring Programs Provide Learning Experiences Throughout Ocean and Monmouth Counties

(13/P16) TRENTON - Staff at Island Beach State Park are taking popular nature programs on the road while work continues to restore the partially reopened park following Hurricane Sandy, DEP Commissioner Bob Martin announced today.

Educators and experts with the State Parks System are now bringing the Scales and Trails, Birds of Island Beach, and Shells on the Shore programs to any interested groups or schools. The programs are being conducted by members of the park's interpretive program staff and supporting partners, Conserve Wildlife Foundation and Friends of Island Beach State Park.

Island Beach State Park is one of the most popular destinations in the State Park System. The DEP recently reopened the northern portion of the park for walking, fishing and driving. Although the Forked River Interpretive Center and Nature Center at the southern end of the island, where the programs are typically held, did not sustain significant damage from Sandy, they remain closed while crews work to improve access to that part of the island.

"We are committed to a full recovery from Sandy," said Island Beach State Park Manager Ray Bukowski. "Reopening the gates to the park was a significant symbol of our resolve. So is resuming interpretive programs that have helped so many people experience a deeper connection to this special place. We remain committed to these programs and invite groups to again enjoy the unique and important learning experiences they provide."

The DEP partially reopened Island Beach on Jan. 25 for walking, sport fishing and four-wheel driving, for vehicles that obtain a permit, at Ocean Bathing Area 1, and is making every effort to fully reopen the park by the peak summer visitor season. Admission to the park remains free while cleanup and restoration continues.

The touring educational programs last for an hour and cost \$85. Staff will travel to groups in the Ocean County and Monmouth County area. A maximum of 25 participants is allowed per program. Larger groups can be accommodated by scheduling consecutive programs. An additional consecutive program on the same topic is \$50. For more information or to schedule a program, call the park at (732) 793-0506.

"This is a great way for students, scouts, seniors and others to get an Island State Beach Park experience at their own facility while the park is being restored," said Becky Laboy, the park's Interpretive Program Manager. "We're very excited and eager to take our show on the road."

The Scales and Tails program provides fascinating insights into the ways Island Beach State Park's animals, such as the diamondback terrapin, adapt to the harsh environment of a barrier island. Birds of Island Beach provides a glimpse into the wide variety of songbirds, wading birds, shorebirds and birds of prey that depend on the Island Beach ecosystem. Shells on the Shore focuses on the wide diversity of seashells found at Island Beach and the animals that

depend on them for survival.

In another form of interpretive outreach, Laboy will be presenting a program about the park at the 24th Annual Pinelands Short Course on March 23 at Burlington County College. The event is sponsored by the New Jersey Pinelands Commission and BCC's Pinelands Institute of Natural and Environmental Studies. More information about that event can be found at:
<http://nj.gov/pinelands/about/events/>

For more information on Island Beach State Park, visit:
<http://www.state.nj.us/dep/parksandforests/parks/island.html>