



IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**DEP KICKS OFF SUMMER SEASON BY WELCOMING THE PUBLIC TO ENJOY
THE OUTDOORS AT STATE PARKS AND FORESTS**

'Vax and Visit' Program Offers Free Parks Pass to Encourage COVID-19 Vaccinations

(21/P15) TRENTON – New Jersey’s state parks, forests, recreation areas and historic sites are gearing up to open swim areas, expand camping amenities and offer numerous outdoor educational programs ahead of Memorial Day weekend, Acting Department of Environmental Protection Commissioner Shawn M. LaTourette announced today.

Acting Commissioner LaTourette visited Lake Hopatcong today to announce the summer season kickoff, promote the Department’s new ‘Vax and Visit’ program as part of “Operation Jersey Summer,” and to highlight significant progress the DEP is making to address the impacts of Harmful Algal Blooms in New Jersey’s lakes and rivers.

Governor Phil Murphy recently announced several new vaccination incentives as part of “Operation Jersey Summer,” a statewide public awareness campaign aimed at vaccinating New Jersey residents who live, work or study in the state against COVID-19. The new incentives

include a [State Parks Vax Pass](#), providing free access to New Jersey’s 51 state parks and facilities including Island Beach State Park.



Beginning Thursday, May 27, the DEP will offer a free State Parks Vax Pass under the new ‘Vax and Visit’ campaign to all New Jersey residents who receive at least one dose of their COVID-19 vaccination by July 4, 2021. The

State Parks Vax Pass, which will be of the same value as the Annual State Parks Pass, will allow free access to all state parks and forest facilities that charge daily walk-in or parking fees, from May 27 through Dec. 31, 2021. The DEP will also provide refunds to residents who already purchased Annual State Park Passes this year and have been fully vaccinated.

“We know the public is eager to get outdoors to enjoy camping, swimming, hiking and boating at our many beautiful state parks, forests and natural areas,” **Acting Commissioner LaTourette said.** “At DEP, we continue to rely on the best available science to protect our watersheds and provide guidance that prioritizes public health and protects the vitality of our lakeshore communities. We encourage all residents and visitors to take care of themselves and each other by getting vaccinated against COVID-19 and heading outdoors for exercise and recreation.”

“Since my early days in office, I’ve been fighting to ensure Lake Hopatcong and all our lakes in New Jersey are cared for and harmful algae blooms are addressed,” said **Rep. Mikie Sherrill (NJ-11).** “Across New Jersey, our outdoor spaces are treasures for everyone to enjoy. It’s on all of us to ensure they’re protected and we’re taking every measure possible to maintain them with every tool available. I’ve been proud of the work we’ve accomplished in partnership with all levels of government to address this crucial issue, and look forward to continuing to work with my colleagues in Congress, the NJDEP and our state, county and local officials as we continue these efforts.”

The DEP’s commitment to address Harmful Algal Blooms is welcome news in lakeshore communities where local businesses thrive during boating season.

"As we enter the summer we are thrilled by the progress that has been made through the collaboration of the DEP and the Lake Hopatcong Community,” said **Marty Kane, chairman of the Lake Hopatcong Foundation Board of Trustees.** “The sewerage of Hopatcong State Park and the new sewers constructed in the Borough of Hopatcong are important steps in improving water quality. Additionally, the demonstration projects on the prevention and treatment of HABs undertaken at Lake Hopatcong through grants from NJDEP gives the entire New Jersey lakes community hope moving forward.”

“The devastating impacts of the 2019 HAB on Lake Hopatcong spurred collaboration between state and local stakeholders,” said **Lake Hopatcong Commission Chairman Ronald Smith.** “Through the establishment of the 2020 HAB grant program, the DEP provided crucial funding for projects designed to prevent and mitigate HABs. These projects, installed with the assistance of our local municipalities, counties and lake's groups are already showing promising results. The achievements of our greater lake community in the past two years are a testament to what can be accomplished when we work together toward a common goal.”

Visitors are reminded that face coverings are required in all indoor state park and forest facilities including park offices, nature centers, bathrooms and at gatehouses. Social distancing of at least 6 feet must also be maintained at all times.

“The Park Service staff have worked hard throughout the winter months to ensure the state’s parks and forests are able to provide the quality outdoor experience everyone is craving,” said

John Cecil, Director of the Division of Parks and Forestry. “Improvements to camping facilities and swim areas have been made and additional full-time and seasonal staff have been recruited to meet the increased need for access to the state’s open spaces.”

Visitors are reminded that popular state parks often fill to capacity on weekends and holidays. Filled-to-capacity closure updates are provided through the Park Service’s [Facebook page](#), or by signing up for [text and email alerts](#).

Expanded Swimming, Camping and Fishing Amenities

Beginning Memorial Day weekend, Island Beach State Park and Round Valley Recreation Area’s lifeguarded swim areas will open to the public.

Swimming is only permitted when lifeguards are on duty from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Certain swimming areas operate five days a week. A detailed swim schedule can be found on the [Park Service’s website](#).

Summer lifeguard job opportunities remain available at Atsion Recreation Area, Bass River State Forest, Cheesquake State Park, High Point State Park, Hopatcong State Park, Parvin State Park, and Wawayanda State Park – which all plan to open later in the season. Lifeguard salaries start at \$13 per hour in most areas. Oceanfront lifeguards at Island Beach State Park start at \$14 per hour. Maintenance staff is also needed at select properties. Interested applicants may apply at www.nj.gov/dep/workinparks.

Camping options have expanded significantly since last season to now include primitive campsites, group campsites, cabins, lean-tos and shelters.

Cabin, shelter and lean-to rentals are available for weekend-only reservations to ensure thorough cleaning procedures can take place between guests.

Camping reservations may be made online through Dec. 15 at www.camping.nj.gov.

Due to popular demand, Island Beach State Park will for the first time offer a weekday-only mobile sportfishing permit. The permit allows those interested in surf fishing to drive their four-wheel-drive vehicles on the beach to their fishing location. Additional details on this new pass are forthcoming and will be announced on the State Park Service’s [Facebook page](#).

Nature Programming and Historic Site Tours

Outdoor naturalist- and historian-led programs in New Jersey’s open spaces and historic sites are ongoing and frequently offered. To join a guided hike or history program, review the State Park Service’s event calendar at www.njparksandforests.org/education/calendar.html.

Pre-registration is required for most programs. Masks must be worn for indoor programs, and social distancing must be maintained at all times.

Many nature centers and historic sites will reopen on July 1, further expanding educational opportunities.

Keep it Clean and Green

Parks and forest visitors are reminded to bring a bag or two with them for trash, recycling and to clean up after their pet.

In addition, visitors can help protect plants and animals at parks and forests by taking with them any trash they generate and carrying out any materials they bring in with them. State Park Service facilities do not have trash receptacles.

To learn more about New Jersey's parks, forests and historic sites, visit www.njparksandforests.org.

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Follow Acting Commissioner LaTourette on Twitter and Instagram @shawnlatur and the DEP on Twitter [@NewJerseyDEP](https://twitter.com/NewJerseyDEP)

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