



**IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Sept. 4, 2013

Contact: Bob Considine (609) 984-1795

Lawrence Ragonese (609) 292-2994

Lawrence Hajna (609) 984-1795

**ISLAND BEACH STATE PARK TO HOST 16TH ANNUAL BEACH PLUM FESTIVAL**  
*EVENT MARKS ANOTHER MILESTONE IN STATE PARK SYSTEM'S SUCCESSFUL POST-SUPERSTORM SANDY RECOVERY*

(13/P87) TRENTON – The 16<sup>th</sup> annual Island Beach State Park Beach Plum Festival, a long-running tradition in the state park system, will be held on Sunday, Sept. 8, DEP Commissioner Bob Martin announced today.

The event, which serves as the largest fundraiser of the year for non-profit park partner Friends of Island Beach State Park, will be held from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., rain or shine, at Ocean Bathing Area 1. There will be no fee at the gate, but a \$5 parking donation is suggested to help support the festival.

The Beach Plum Festival is another event highlighting a very successful post-Superstorm Sandy summer for the state's busiest summer park.

“We have enjoyed a very successful summer at Island Beach State Park, particularly after Superstorm Sandy, thanks in no small part to committed partners such as Friends of Island Beach State Park,” said Mark Texel, director of the State Park Service. “We encourage residents to come out to the festival on Sunday for a unique experience at this jewel of the state park system.”

“The Beach Plum Festival is our biggest fundraiser of the year and we are hoping for a good turnout so we can continue our mission of improving programs and events at Island Beach State Park,” said Patricia M. Vargo, president of the Friends of Island Beach State Park. “The park is such a special and unique place, and our commitment to it is as strong as ever – to our members it is a labor of love.”

The volunteer Friends of Island Beach State Park was formed in 1996 to enhance interpretive, educational and recreational programs at the park and to encourage protection of the barrier island ecosystem. The group, now 150 members strong, publishes and distributes 30,000 copies of the park's Visitor Guide annually, has funded improvements to the park's Nature Center and Interpretive Center and installed a state-of-the-art camera with night vision to monitor an osprey nest at the park.

The Friends of Island Beach State Park also purchases American Beach Grass and organizes dune grass planting every spring to promote stabilization of the park's primary dunes. Those efforts took on increased meaning this year as more dune replenishment was needed as a result of Superstorm Sandy.

“The Friends of Island Beach State Park have long been a vital partner to our park,” said park manager Ray Bukowski. “But they went above and beyond this year, especially after Superstorm Sandy, to assist in the restoration and cleanup of the park and replacing destroyed beach grass and vegetation. We are as grateful as we can be for their contributions.”

As in years’ past, the Beach Plum Festival offers visitors a chance to engage in an array of activities, including beach plum picking, jelly-making demonstrations, children’s games, a kayak raffle, as well as sampling some beach plum ice cream. There also will be music, crafts and exhibits.

In addition, the festival gives visitors a chance to view lifesaving demonstrations by Island Beach State Park lifeguards and to take part in seining on the bay with park naturalists.

The wild beach plum, which is native to Island Beach State Park and other coastal areas from Maine to Virginia, is a tart fruit usually measuring less than two centimeters in circumference and which ripens in early September. Some have described the taste of the bluish fruit as a mix between a plum, strawberry and apricot. It can be eaten raw, but is often repurposed as a jam or jelly, marinade or dessert sauce. The plant can grow up to two meters high in its natural dune habitat and is salt-tolerant.

Island Beach State Park, a narrow barrier island stretching for 10 miles between the ocean and Barnegat Bay, enjoyed a successful season after reaching the Christie Administration’s goal of having the park fully operational for the peak summer season.

A full slate of interpretive programs also returned this summer, with the addition of the park’s first full-time naturalist in 10 years. The park has also hosted two well-attended Harvest The Bay festival days this summer, which provide visitors an opportunity to learn about the clams, crabs and fish that are important to the ecology and economy of Barnegat Bay. The third and final Harvest The Bay event will be held on Oct. 12.

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

For more information on the Friends of Island Beach State Park, visit:  
<http://friendsofislandbeach.org/>

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