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CONTACT: Larry Ragonese (609-292-2994)
Larry Hajna (609-984-1795)
Bob Considine (609-292-2994)

CHRISTIE ADMINISTRATION INVITES STATE RESIDENTS TO CELEBRATE THE NEW YEAR BY PARTICIPATING IN FREE “FIRST DAY HIKES” AT STATE PARKS

(13/P116) TRENTON – The New Jersey State Park Service will conduct free guided hikes, walks, interpretive tours and other special outdoor activities at 15 locations across the state on New Year’s Day as part of the annual America’s State Parks First Day Hikes initiative, Department of Environmental Protection Commissioner Bob Martin announced today.

This initiative, occurring in all 50 states, offers individuals and families an opportunity to begin the New Year by connecting with the outdoors and learning about New Jersey’s natural treasures. First Day Hikes offer a great way to get outside, exercise, enjoy nature, learn some local history, and welcome the New Year with friends and family.

“This is a great way to start off the New Year to reconnect with nature and explore the variety of activities and amenities that all of our state parks have to offer,” Commissioner Martin said. “Our knowledgeable park staff and volunteers welcome the opportunity to share a great outdoor experience which we hope will carry on for our residents throughout the year.”

“We invite you to experience the quiet beauty of nature in winter while benefiting from the company of a knowledgeable state park guide or volunteer and enjoying the health benefits of being outdoors in nature,” added Mark Texel, Director of the State Park Service.

New Jersey’s state parks, forests and recreation areas boast a variety of beautiful settings for year-round outdoor recreation. Each First Day Hike will offer an opportunity to explore the unique natural and cultural treasures with nature-oriented treks, history themed interpretive tours, and guided horseback and mountain biking at a state park close to home. Park staff and volunteers will lead the hikes, which will range from a mile-long, accessible walks to an all-day 15-mile hike.

New Year’s Day free guided hikes will take place at the following New Jersey locations:

- Bass River State Forest (Tuckerton) at 11 a.m.
- Belleplain State Forest (Hike) 10 a.m.; (Mountain Bike Ride) 11 a.m.
- Cheesquake State Park (Matawan) at 1 p.m.
- Grover Cleveland Birthplace State Historic Site (Caldwell) at 11 a.m.
- Island Beach State Park, Explore History & Ecology Hikes at 9, 10, 11 a.m., 12 and 1 p.m.
- Kittatinny Valley State Park, (Paulinskill Valley Trail Hike at Footbridge Park, Blairstown) at 10 a.m.
- Kittatinny Valley State Park, (Paulinskill Valley Trail Horseback Ride at Halsey Farm) at 10 a.m.

- Monmouth Battlefield State Park, (Manalapan) Battlefield Interpretive Tour at 11 a.m.; First Day Amble at 12 p.m.; Revolutionary Resolutions Hike at 1 p.m.
- Princeton Battlefield State Park, (Princeton) at 7:30 a.m.
- Rancocas State Park (New Lisbon) at 11 a.m. and 1 p.m.
- Ringwood State Park, (New Jersey Botanical Gardens, Ringwood) at 1 p.m.
- Round Valley Recreation Area (Lebanon) at 10 a.m.
- Spruce Run Recreation Area/Voorhees State Park (Highlands Trail, Asbury) 8:45 a.m. – 5 p.m.
- Washington Crossing State Park (Titusville) at 10 a.m.
- Waterloo Village (Stanhope) at 1 p.m.
- Wharton State Forest (Atsion) at 10 a.m.
- Wharton State Forest (in Franklin Parker Preserve) at 10 a.m.
- Wharton State Forest (Batsto Village) at 10:30 a.m.

Additional details about registration, hike locations, difficulty and length, terrain and tips regarding proper clothing can be found at

http://www.njparksandforests.org/parks/first_day_hikes.html

First Day Hikes originated more than 20 years ago at the Blue Hills Reservation, a state park in Milton, Massachusetts. The program was launched to promote both healthy lifestyles throughout the year and year round recreation at state parks. Last year marked the first time all 50 state park systems across the nation have joined together to sponsor First Day Hikes.

New Jersey's state park systems have participated from the start of this initiative, growing from 7 hikes in 2012, to 26 hikes and rides across the state for Jan. 1, 2014.

For more information about America's State Parks, please visit:

<http://www.americasstateparks.org/Home>

For more information about New Jersey State Parks and Forests, please visit:

<http://www.state.nj.us/dep/parksandforests/>. The Official Facebook page for New Jersey State Parks, Forests and Historic Sites can be found at:

<https://www.facebook.com/NewJerseyStateParks>

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