



DEP NEWS RELEASE

New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection

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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CHRISTIE ADMINISTRATION INVITES RESIDENTS AND VISITORS TO TAKE PART IN FIRST DAY HIKES SPOTLIGHTING NEW JERSEY'S SPECTACULAR SCENERY AND RICH HISTORY

(15/P121) TRENTON – The Christie Administration and the Department of Environmental Protection's State Park Service invite New Jersey residents and visitors to get 2016 started on the right foot by taking part in fun, invigorating and educational outdoor activities to be offered statewide as part of the annual America's State Parks First Day Hikes initiative.



State Park Service staff and volunteers will conduct 18 guided hikes, walks, and interpretive tours, as well as two bike rides and a horseback ride at state parks, forests and historic sites at locations from the Highlands to Cape May. Most of the events will be held on Friday, January 1. Hikes of Princeton Battlefield State Park will take place Wednesday, December 30, and Sunday, January 3.

Not only do these events provide opportunities to enjoy spectacular scenery, history lovers will appreciate offerings that will take them back to important events in American history, said DEP Commissioner Bob Martin.

“Activities are scheduled conveniently throughout the state and offer a wide range of experiences that showcase our parks and give the public an opportunity to soak in their special beauty at this time of year,” Commissioner Martin said. “Our experienced park staff and volunteers welcome this chance to share a great outdoor experience, to show off our state park system, and to answer questions. We hope these visits become the

first of many throughout the year that participants will make to our wonderful park system, one of the nation's best.”

Some unique offerings include hiking around vast Pinelands cranberry bogs, cycling or horseback riding along scenic trails of the Kittatinny Valley, following the hallowed paths the Continental Army took on Christmas Night 1776 as part of its historic victory at Trenton, and walking in the footsteps of Molly Pitcher at Monmouth Battlefield State Park.

All of these events are free. Most do not require pre-registration, but some do. For detailed information on starting times, how to dress, length and difficulty ratings for each hike, what to expect to experience, and which events require pre-registration, visit: http://www.state.nj.us/dep/parksandforests/parks/first_day_hikes.html

Some of the events are weather-dependent. The website will provide updates in the event of inclement weather.



The state version of this national initiative offers individuals and families an opportunity to begin the New Year by connecting with the outdoors and learning about New Jersey's natural resources and diverse landscapes. First Day events allow residents to get outside, exercise, enjoy nature and learn local history, while welcoming the New Year in a healthy manner with family and friends.

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. The New Jersey State Park Service has been participating in First Day Hikes since this became a nationwide event in 2012.

“This is New Jersey's fifth year participating in the initiative and each First Day event will offer an opportunity to explore the natural and cultural treasures of your favorite state parks, forests and historic sites,” said Mark Texel, Acting Director of the Division of Parks and Forestry. “Park staff and volunteers will lead the hikes, which will range from mile-long, accessible walks to a 15-mile-long, all-day hike. We invite you to experience the quiet beauty of our parks and historic sites in winter with the company of a knowledgeable state park guide or volunteer.”

“Last year, we hosted nearly 41,000 people who hiked 79,442 miles in our state parks across the country as part of America's State Parks First Day Hikes,” said Priscilla Geigis, President of the National Association of State Park Directors (NASPD). “Think of it as the start of a new and healthy lifestyle, for the whole family. Whether you're staying close to home or traveling, join us at one of America's State Parks on New Year's Day.”

Jan. 1 hikes in New Jersey will take place at Bass River State Forest, Belleplain State Forest, Brendan T. Byrne State Forest, Cheesequake State Park, Kittatinny Valley State Park, Monmouth Battlefield State park, Rancocas State Park, Ringwood State Park, Round Valley Recreation Area, Spruce Run Recreation Area, Stokes State Forest, Warren Grove Recreation Area (Bass River State Forest), Washington Crossing State Park, Waterloo Village and Wharton State Forest. Princeton Battlefield State Park will host hikes on Dec. 30 and Jan. 3.

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:
www.facebook.com/NewJerseyStateParks

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