

Recreation

The natural resources of the Delaware Bay and Estuary Basin provide numerous recreational opportunities. Situated along the Atlantic Flyway, Delaware's coast has become a well-known, ideal destination for birders. The vast salt marshes rimming the coast serve as outdoor environmental laboratories for studying and observing nature. Throughout the basin, a wide variety of ponds and interlacing streams provide exploration opportunities for canoeists and kayakers. Hunting, boating and fishing have long been popular pastimes for residents and visitors.

The basin is home to four state parks, 10 state wildlife areas, 25 fishing access areas, and two national wildlife refuges that offer recreational experiences in a variety of natural settings. Many of the state wildlife areas are situated along the coast, taking in tidal marsh. Bombay Hook and Prime Hook national wildlife refuges also lie along the coast, protecting and providing the public access to marsh environment.

Delaware's historic role in the nation's defense is reflected in the architecture and activities at Fort Delaware and Fort DuPont state parks. In addition to the living history programs at the restored fort on Pea Patch Island, Fort Delaware

State Park provides another mecca for birders at the Pea Patch Island Heronry, encompassed within the park's 287-island acreage. Visitors to an observation deck often catch a glimpse of nesting great blues or other wading birds. Former mill ponds at Killens Pond and Lums Pond State Parks are popular year-round fishing spots as well as destinations for picnicking, camping, hiking and boating. Horseback riding trails add another dimension to outdoor recreation at Lums Pond State Park.

Though a good number of opportunities exist for fishing and boating on state ponds and in the Delaware Bay and Estuary, water quality concerns are bound to affect the viability of these resources for continued enjoyment by the public.

Community-Based Recreation

In addition to the recreation built around the basin's natural resources, residents have a need for close-to-home recreational opportunities. Local recreation programs and opportunities vary from county to county. Both New Castle and Kent counties provide parks for their residents; Sussex County does not. At this time, Sussex County government has no plans to begin providing recreation services for its residents. New Castle and Kent counties also require that open space be set



Fort Delaware State Park, Pea Patch Island.



aside when land is developed for residential purposes. Many municipalities within the basin operate parks that help to meet the recreation needs of their residents.

Within the Delaware Bay and Estuary Basin are 90 county open space and parkland sites accounting for 997 acres as well as 96 municipal parks totaling 618 acres. While these parks and their amenities provide recreation opportunities, the demand for outdoor recreation facilities continues to outpace supply.

The Division of Parks & Recreation keeps a pulse on the changing demand for outdoor recreation facility needs and issues. In addition to facilitating 14 public workshops throughout the state in 2002, the division conducted a telephone survey of 1,800 Delaware households and a local official mail-in survey as part of the planning process to identify and prioritize outdoor recreation and conservation needs in Delaware. The result of this extensive public input is the 2003-2008 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) used as a tool to assist communities and counties in their planning efforts as well as to guide investments in park development and land acquisition. The state was divided into 5 regions for the purpose of refining the data and findings. Development patterns and census tracts were among the many factors considered in determining the regions. The plan identifies and prioritizes the recreation priorities for facilities in each region. The Delaware

Basin encompasses 3 of these planning regions.

Several facility needs were consistently reflected as being a high or moderate priority throughout the state, including walking and bike paths, picnic areas, playgrounds, swimming pools and fishing areas. In addition, 9 out of 10 Delawareans surveyed indicated that outdoor recreation programs for persons with disabilities, programs for teens and nature and historic education programs should be a very or somewhat important priority for state and local funding.

Delawareans are aware of the landscape changes occurring throughout the state. According to the phone survey, approximately 1 out of 2 responded that there are too few forests, farmland or urban green spaces in Delaware while less than 5% responded that there are too many of these landscapes in Delaware. Although less than 5% responded that there are too many wetlands, nearly 1 out of 4 responded that they did not know if there are too many, too few or the right amount of wetlands in Delaware. When asked about the amount of development in Delaware, 7 out of 10 responded that there is too much development.

DNREC's Division of Parks and Recreation provides grants for park and trail acquisition and development through the Delaware Land and Water Conservation Trust Fund. Grants are awarded annually to municipalities and counties.