**PARKS AND RECREATION COUNCIL MEETING**

**LOCATION:**

**Legislative Hall – Senate Hearing Room**
411 Legislative Ave, Dover, DE 19901
**Zoom: https://shorturl.at/sMm4E**
Meeting ID: 890 4960 1243
Passcode: 067290

**Thursday, November 5, 2026**
**9:30 a.m.**

**AGENDA**

I. Introductions/Announcements

II. Official Business/Council Activities
- A. Approval of Minutes from August meeting
- B. Chairman's Report
- C. Council Member Reports
  1. Natural Areas Advisory Council
  2. Environmental Stewardship Committee
  3. Cultural Resources Committee
  4. Accessibility Committee

III. Public Comment

IV. Staff Reports
- A. Policy/Legislation
- B. Project/Initiative Updates (Quarterly Report)
  1. Operations, Maintenance and Programming
  2. Natural Resources Police – Parks
  3. Planning, Preservation and Development
  4. Administrative Services

V. Outdoor Recreation, Parks and Trails (ORPT) Grant Program Recommendation

VI. Strategic Plan Update

VII. Old Business
- A. Regulations Update

VIII. New Business

IX. Upcoming Events
- A. Next Council Meeting – February 4, 2027 – Fort DuPont

X. Adjournment

# Director's Office

## Matthew Ritter

## Parks Personnel Update

**Colin Adams-Toomey** promoted on Aug. 10 from the New Castle Conservation District's interpretive program manager at Auburn Valley State Park to the merit trainer educator II at Bellevue State Park. Colin held his position at Auburn Valley since June 2026 and previously worked as a seasonal interpretive program manager for First State Heritage Park. He holds a bachelor's degree in Theater and Ancient Celtic Studies/Irish Studies from the University of Wales as well as a two-year conservatory course in Production, Film Directing and Playwriting from the American Academy of Dramatic Arts.

**Michael Fink** was hired on Oct. 5 to the New Castle Conservation District interpretive program manager position at Auburn Valley State Park. He first came to the division over the summer as a seasonal naturalist at Fort Delaware State Park. Michael holds a bachelor's degree in History from the University of Delaware.

**Joseph Huffman** resigned on Oct. 2 from the physical plant maintenance trades mechanic III position at Delaware Seashore State Park. He had worked with the division since 2024.

**Jay Jolly** resigned on Aug. 8 from the conservation technician III position at Delaware Seashore State Park. He had worked with the division from 2018-2021 and again from December 2025 until August 2026.

**Shane McLelland** promoted on Oct. 5 from the New Castle Conservation District's marine and land based heavy equipment operator at the Indian River Marina to the merit conservation technician IV at the Indian River Marina. He has been with the division since October 2025.

**David Reisinger** was hired on Aug. 21 to the physical plant trades mechanic III position at Delaware Seashore State Park. Prior to joining the division, David worked in the private sector as an owner/operator of a construction company.

**Jeremy Timney** transferred on Sept. 6 from the physical plant maintenance trades mechanic III at Lums Pond State Park to the physical plant trades mechanic III at Fort Delaware State Park.

**JoAnn Wright** retired on Oct. 15 from the senior administrative specialist position at Bellevue State Park after seven years of service to the State. JoAnn started her career with Bellevue in 2019 as an administrative specialist II.

# Operations, Maintenance and Programming

Grant Melville

# Statewide

A nor'easter over the weekend of Sept. 26-27 significantly impacted the coastal region parks. The most extensive impacts were experienced at Delaware Seashore State Park. Over the course of the three-day storm, the entire south campground flooded, and park staff notified and relocated all campers to the north campground. The camp store sustained damage to infrastructure, displays and inventory. Additional damage included the Holts Landing boat dock and erosion along all the beaches and Assawoman Canal banks. Significant cleanup efforts were needed throughout the park following the storm.
Right next door, the Indian River Marina fared considerably better. Although the water level rose significantly, only one power pedestal was submerged, and it needs to be replaced. Overall, the floating docks sustained no damage.
At Cape Henlopen, extreme high tides earlier in the week steadily washed away sand around the Main Beach boardwalk. A navigational buoy also washed ashore at Herring Point around Friday, Sept. 25. The storm itself largely spared the park. Flooding was minor, and high winds produced intense surf, but damage was limited to the Gordons Pond trail and some pilings that washed up on the bay beach, which do not appear to have come from the fishing pier. Surf crossings were closed once rising tides made the beaches unsafe, and the fishing pier was closed temporarily until staff could confirm the rough water and wind were not causing structural damage.

## Anniversary Programs

From July to September, Delaware State Parks hosted over 100 programs in celebration of its 75th anniversary and Delaware's 250th anniversary as the First State to sign the Declaration of Independence. Some of these programs highlighted local history, while others were throwback or reimagined park programs. The varied array of offerings included book clubs, history hikes, bird walks, Lyle gun firings and pontoon tours.

## 4th of July Programs

This was a year of anniversaries, both for the division and for the nation. The 250th anniversary was commemorated statewide in a variety of ways and events. Despite high temperatures and summer thunderstorms, the patriotic fervor remained strong. Right in the heart of the state's capital, First State Heritage Park and its partners shared the nation's history with visitors, and 292 people took tours in the state's capital building, the governor's mansion and the John Bell House. The John Bell House displayed a historic flags exhibit and shared information about the War for Independence and the origins of

Delaware.

## Delaware State Fair

Delaware State Parks joined other DNREC divisions in education and outreach at the DNREC building at the annual Delaware State Fair. Delaware State Parks staff from the field and central office volunteered their time to help children enjoy thematic and educational games or safely interact with local species in the touch tank. This year more than 34,000 visitors walked into the DNREC building to cool off and learn from staff from every DNREC division. Delaware State Parks is always grateful to collaborate with their fellow DNREC employees.

# Northern Region

## Alapocas Run State Park

Exhibits at the Blue Ball Barn included:

- Delaware State Parks 75th Anniversary Exhibit, July 1-30
- Kelsey Holveck Art Exhibit, Aug. 4-30
- Latin American Community Center Art Addiction Show, Sept. 3-29.

On Wednesday, Aug. 5, visitors were invited to the Can-Do Playground at Alapocas Run for the Touch-a-Truck event. The event gave 240 visitors an opportunity to explore the many special machines and vehicles used to maintain the park from enforcement to trails and natural resources management.

## Auburn Valley State Park

The heating system upgrade at the Marshall Mansion was completed at a cost of $53,000 and included new oil-fired steam boilers and a programmable thermostat.

The Friends of Auburn Heights (FAH) hosted this year's Red Clay Day on Sept. 20. The FAH served as the main "hub" for local organizations to share information, resources and goods with the community. Free admission to the Marshall Steam Museum was offered as part of the event. Several local businesses and organizations participated in the activity loop, including Dew Point and the Wilmington & Western Railroad.

A special thank you to the Friends of Auburn Heights for organizing the event and providing a welcoming space for the community. Red Clay Day provided an excellent opportunity to connect with neighbors, friends, local organizations and businesses.

## Bellevue State Park and Fox Point State Park

September events at Bellevue included the AstraZeneca Field Day on Sept. 9, with approximately 150 attendees; R&B in the Park on Sept. 13, with approximately 1,000

attendees; the McKean High School Cross-Country Tri-Meet on Sept. 16; the Hoy en Delaware Hispanic Heritage Festival on Sept. 20, which drew approximately 1,000 attendees and the Faithful Friends 5K on Sept. 27, which drew approximately 200 attendees.

At the Mount Pleasant Parsonage, carpentry repairs were completed throughout the building, window frames were repaired, and the exterior was painted to match the property's historic colors.

## Brandywine Zoo

This year, the Brandywine Zoo celebrated a significant conservation milestone by hatching its 100th endangered bog turtle, with an additional 19 hatchlings produced so far this season. Since 2022, the zoo has partnered with the Division of Fish and Wildlife to incubate and head-start endangered bog turtles, giving these vulnerable reptiles a greater chance of survival before being released into their natural habitat. The first year the zoo successfully hatched and released nine turtles. Since then, the zoo has continued to consistently hatch and head-start bog turtles annually, directly contributing to the recovery of one of Delaware's rarest species. As of last year, fewer than 25 adult bog turtles remained in the wild in Delaware.

The completion of the Hidden Falls mixed species habitat was marked with a ribbon-cutting ceremony held on July 23. The $2.5 million exhibit was funded through public and private support and provides year-round habitat including outdoor and climate-controlled indoor areas for five species affected by habitat loss. This milestone was made possible by the hard work, support and collaboration of many individuals and organizations, and the zoo extends its sincere thanks to DNREC, DZS, the generous public and private donors, project partners, staff, volunteers and everyone who helped bring Hidden Falls to life.

Additionally, the zoo was awarded the 2026 Delaware Association for Environmental Education (DAEE) Member Mini-Grant. The $1,000 grant will support field trips for students in the Warner Early Years Program through the zoo’s Panda Cubs program. The funding will allow students to visit the zoo for an educational field trip at no cost to them or their families, providing an opportunity to connect classroom learning with hands-on experiences in conservation and wildlife education.

## White Clay Creek State Park

Notable events this quarter began with the Aug. 24 groundbreaking ceremony for the Creekside Discovery Center, which drew strong participation by legislators and benefited from excellent weather. The University of Delaware cross-country meet followed on Sept. 5, bringing 415 cars, six buses and several Division I schools to the site.

The Sept. 7 Labor Day Concert, featuring Kategory 5, drew roughly 2,000 visitors. Just days later, the Sept. 11 White Clay Creek Classic welcomed 2,085 attendees, making it

one of the year's largest cross-country events.

## Wilmington State Parks

Installation of the Happy Valley Playground was finished in early July and was able to open for the July 4th weekend. A ribbon-cutting and dedication ceremony was held on July 22.

On July 9, heavy storms caused damage across the parks, notably to the Lovering Avenue tennis and basketball courts. Downed trees and debris were removed from the courts; full resurfacing repairs are upcoming.

Notable events included the Delaware Burger Battle at Rockford Park on Aug. 29, with 850 attendees; the Brandywine Festival of the Arts at Brandywine Park on Sept. 12-13, which drew approximately 8,000 people; the DelTech Hometown Heroes 5K at Rockford Park on Sept. 17, with 300 participants; and, on Sept. 19, both the AIDS Delaware Walk 2026 at Brandywine Park, with 300 participants, and the Races2Run Teal Ribbon 5K at Rockford Park, with 200 participants.

# Inland Ponds

## First State Heritage Park

Kent County Tourism became the first sponsor of this year's Delaware Heritage Festival with a $1,000 sponsorship. The organization also received funding through the Parks Donation Grant to support the development of a series of new waysides.
Recent and upcoming programs included Volunteer Garden Day on Aug. 15, Dear Reader Book Club on Aug. 19 and Sept. 16, an Archives Tavern Talk by Outreach's Volunteer Brewing Company on Aug. 20, an Outreach event at the Haddonfield, New Jersey Street Fair on Aug. 22, a Victorian Garden Party at Woodburn on Sept. 5 and a History of Coffee program on Sept.12.

## Fort Delaware State Park

In mid-August, Fort Delaware welcomed six new functional replicas of historic weapons, including three 1842 Springfield muskets, two 1861 Springfield rifle muskets and one 1853 Pattern Enfield rifle musket, along with bayonets. These new weapons replace demonstration firearms that have been in use for more than a decade and were experiencing increased wear and maintenance issues.

As of late September, visitation for the season at the fort totaled 10,918.

## Killens Pond State Park

The 2026 season was a great one at Killens Pond Waterpark, with overall visitation

increasing to 72,502 visitors compared to 58,882 in 2025. The waterpark reached capacity 18 times, and its busiest day saw more than 1,000 guests during a single afternoon session. Two theme nights were scheduled, though one was canceled due to thunderstorms. Puppies in the Pool on Sept. 7 was a big success, drawing more than 150 dogs.

## Lums Pond State Park

The Mill House at Lums Pond was severely damaged during late July storms and collapsed. Snow fencing was installed around the exposed side of the property for safety. The house, built around 1713, was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1973.

Events and activities at Lums Pond this quarter included the Warbirds Over Delaware event at the remote-control field from July 8-11; the Bear Trail Race 10K and Half Marathon on Sept. 6, which brought approximately 400 participants; the PFG Energy corporate employee event on Sept.12 with approximately 250 attendees; and the Freedom Dental Associates corporate event on Sept. 13 with approximately 200 attendees.

Lums Pond received Parks Donation Grant Program funding for playground improvements in Area 2 ($50,000) and shade structures for the cricket fields in Area 3 ($40,000).

## Trap Pond State Park

Trap Pond State Park had a busy summer with several successful events and improvements. On Aug. 22, the Delmarva Adult and Teen Challenge welcomed more than 650 attendees, who enjoyed crabs and watermelon despite heavy rain.

The Trails Crew completed repairs to the Bob Trail bridge on July 31, including the removal of dead trees and branches along the bridge and the installation of lighting, improving safety and peace of mind during storms and high winds.

On Sept. 9, the Laurel and Seaford school districts held a cross-country meet at the park, followed by the Delaware Department of Justice's annual staff picnic at Jason Beach Pavilion on Sept.11, with more than 75 attendees. The park also wrapped up its summer concert series on Sept. 12.

# Coastal Region

## Cape Henlopen State Park

Cape Henlopen had 22 fewer capacity closures this season compared to 2025, with 14 closures at the three parking areas that are tracked.

Improvements at Cape Henlopen this quarter included installation of a ramp at the back of the Officers' Club, a second shade structure added to the playground and repair of a rusted-out net post at the second Deauville tennis court, restoring it to playable condition.

Notable events included the end-of-year celebration for the Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) on July 27; A Delaware Delegation environmental literacy strategy session at the Biden Center on Aug. 13; tours of the HMS De Braak in September and the Democratic Jamboree, which had about 200 participants at the main beach pavilion on Sept 19.

## Delaware Seashore State Park

Delaware Seashore State Park and Fenwick Island State Park saw an increase of 23 capacity closures to 78 in 2026 compared to 55 in 2025 spread across the seven tracked parking areas. South Inlet filled the most with 23 closures, followed by Fenwick Island with 16 closures over the season.

Delaware Seashore continues to see strong visitation and exciting improvements. The park team recently met with organizers of the "Outstanding in the Field" event, a unique beachside dining experience featuring a multi-course meal focused on local seafood and regional offerings. Tickets for the event sold out quickly.

The park is also seeing increased use of its new Quick-Response (QR) code payment signage, with Delaware State Parks processing nearly 14,000 QR transactions to date. Delaware Seashore, including Fenwick Island and Holts Landing, has generated the highest QR payment revenue among the parks, driven largely by its extensive parking operations.

Park improvements also continued with the installation of six new tent pads in the South Campground, providing level elevated sites in areas prone to holding water after storms. In addition, apron paving at 3Rs and repair work at Tower Road Bayside have been completed.

On Aug. 20 Big Chill Beach Club hosted a charity 5K to support Believe in Tomorrow Children's Foundation which provides hospital and respite housing services to critically ill children and their families. The event attracted more than 200 participants.

Working with enforcement and in an effort to provide as much clarity as possible, additional signs were installed along the roadway leading into Fresh Pond off Hickman Road. This area, which is state park property, has been used by some visitors to avoid paying the required parking fees. The new signs identify the area as state park property and indicate that parking fees apply during the fee season.

## Indian River Marina

Indian River Marina (IRM) had a busy and successful summer and early fall, beginning with the 10th Annual Tuna Blast Tournament on July 18. The slip holder-only event attracted

27 boats with more than 100 participants and was completed just before a powerful storm arrived.

The marina was also honored to be named the 2026 Best of Coastal Style – Best Marina in Sussex County. Other summer highlights included a July 25 movie night featuring *Finding Nemo*, which welcomed approximately 50 guests, and the inaugural Dockside and IRM Classic Tournament on Aug. 22. Although no qualifying tuna were caught during the tournament, the event provided an opportunity for participants to enjoy a day on the water.

On Sept. 19, the marina welcomed approximately 3,800 visitors to its Annual Autumn Art Festival, featuring 55 vendors, five food trucks, free pumpkin decorating, face painting and piñata fun for children. The festival was a great success and a festive way to kick off the fall season.

# Interpretation and Programming Highlights

## 2026 Summer Concert Series

Delaware State Parks hosted 64 concerts for the 2026 Summer Concert Series, providing visitors with opportunities to enjoy different genres of music in an outdoor setting. There were 11 weather cancellations, with several rescheduled, resulting in a total of 33,032 attendees across all concert locations — Bellevue, Holts Landing, Killens Pond, Trap Pond, White Clay Creek and Wilmington State Parks. The largest concert was on Aug. 23 at Bellevue State Park, where 2,010 visitors came out to enjoy the tunes of The Newspaper Taxis. Thank you to the 2026 sponsors including Platinum Parks Partners, Dogfish Head Beer and Benevolence and Delaware Tourism Office, and our Premium Parks Partners, 302 Horseshoe Crab, Delaware Bluecoats, University of Delaware, Quiet Resort (aka Bethany-Fenwick Area Chamber of Commerce), Delaware Division of the Arts and several Friends organizations from the parks.

## Arts in the Parks Partnership with Delaware Division of Arts

This year's Arts in the Park series, funded by the Delaware Division of the Arts (DDOA), is well underway. To date, 17 projects and programs have been completed with over 3,864 people reached, and additional events are scheduled for the fall. Highlights from this quarter include the Nature Art Club at Bellevue State Park, the annual Bug Days of Summer festival at Brandywine Creek, a new lunchtime concert series at the Brandywine Zoo called Zoo Tunes, a Victorian Garden Party with First State Heritage Park and Civil War-era musical performances at Fort Delaware State Park.

## Parks for Pollinators

For the third year, Delaware State Parks and the Brandywine Zoo participated in the annual Parks for Pollinators Bioblitz, a National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) program designed to document pollinator species throughout the park system by uploading photos to the iNaturalist app. As of Sept. 22, 1,600 observations had been made by more than 166 individuals, documenting 544 unique species of pollinators and their host plants across Delaware State Parks. Currently, the division's project is in 14th place on the national leaderboard among more than 100 other park agencies.

## Youth Programming

**2026 Summer Camp**

Delaware State Parks offered 95 camps this summer. In total, 1,261 camp spots were filled across nine camp locations — Alapocas Run, Bellevue, Brandywine Creek, Brandywine Zoo, Cape Henlopen, Killens Pond, Lums Pond, Trap Pond and White Clay Creek. Thank you to the amazing camp staff team for pivoting and coming up with alternative activities and indoor solutions due to the increasing challenges of severe weather, extreme heat and poor air quality during the summer months. Several camp scholarships were awarded this season by Friends groups at Bellevue, Brandywine Creek, Killens Pond and White Clay Creek.

**Camp Feedback Highlights**

95% of 71 respondents rated their child's Day Camp experience a 4 or 5 out of 5 stars.

*"It was the best camp experience we have had, and we are so grateful that he got the opportunity to participate. Your program is really well thought out and the staff we encountered were so kind and amazing with the kids. The organization, rules and structure the camp counselors provided made a first-time camper feel at ease quickly! He was waking up early every morning to get to camp as quickly as he could. He came home every day telling us what he had learned and where he thinks the secret fishing spots are. Thank you for the time and effort it takes to put on an event like this. We look forward to participating in more camps in the future. This camp made his summer!"*

*"The counselors were amazing, she really felt like they cared. Sometimes she has a hard time making friends, but she had no issues and loved it from day one, which I think was partially due to the staff making it so fun and making sure she felt included."*

**Girl Scouts Love State Parks**

On Sept. 12-13 and Sept. 19-20, Delaware State Parks participated in the National Girl Scouts Love State Parks initiative, hosting 13 programs attended by 158 scouts. This year included two weekends, and participating parks included Auburn Valley, Alapocas Run, Bellevue, Brandywine Creek, Fort Delaware, Fort Miles Historical Area at Cape Henlopen and White Clay Creek.

**Biden Environmental Center Programming**
Cape Henlopen's Biden Environmental Center hosted the Capital School District for three days of programming July 14-16. Environmental education activities from Fort Miles and the Seaside Nature Center were on the schedule along with a free-flighted bird presentation by Animal Behavior and Conservation Connections. The school district received 21st Century grant funding to run this camp experience for over 250 elementary and middle school students.

**FY26 School Program Report**
In FY26, Delaware State Parks, along with the Brandywine Zoo, delivered 576 school programs, reaching more than 21,284 students resulting in approximately 758 contact hours. Delaware State Parks and the zoo also hosted 83 programs to external youth organizations reaching an additional 1,985 children.

Special events enhanced student experiences through hands-on science and history activities, including *Make a Splash!* at the St. Jones Reserve, *Saving the Past*, *Shaping the Future* (a National Park Service event on The Green in Dover) and the third annual Homeschool Day at First State Heritage Park.

This year several school programs were supported through scholarships and other funding. Several programs were funded thanks to the generosity of Friends groups at Bellevue, Cape Henlopen, Lums Pond, Trap Pond, White Clay Creek and Wilmington State Parks. The O'Neill Environmental Education Endowment supported both the Residential Ecosystem Explorers at Cape Henlopen (REECH) program and statewide school programming. Other partners included the National Park Service, A Tree for Every Delawarean Initiative (TEDI) and the M&T Bank Charitable Foundation supporting programming at the Brandywine Zoo.

**Statewide Teacher Workshops**
On Tuesday, Sept. 15, the division participated in Stem ConnectED Day, a statewide, partner-facilitated teacher workshop coordinated by the Delaware Foundation for Science and Math Education. The division offered three workshops, one workshop in each county, with host sites at Cape Henlopen's Biden Environmental Center, the nature center at Killens Pond and the Brandywine Zoo. The sites were each at or close to the maximum registration, with a total of 65 teachers participating across the state. Each site provided background on Delaware State Parks programming as well as the individual site and offered sample STEM-focused programs from different state parks.

Teachers got to explore the Brandywine Zoo, do water quality monitoring, meet reptiles and amphibians up close, participate in a squid dissection, make a model rocket, measure trees to calculate carbon sequestration and more. Across sites, teachers networked and learned about ways to think outside the box when it comes to collaborating with Delaware State Parks to enrich learning experiences.

**Environmental Literacy Summit**
On Aug. 13, the first Delaware-focused Environmental Literacy Summit was held at the Biden Environmental Center at Cape Henlopen. Approximately 25 people were in attendance from organizations across Delaware related to education and the environment, including the Delaware Department of Education (DOE) and DNREC. Division staff in attendance included Angel Burns, AshLeigh McKinney, Richard Julian and Liz Kain-Bolen. Other DNREC staff participated, including the Chesapeake Bay Program lead Dr. Holly Walker and her team. The day included a recap of May's Chesapeake Bay Regional Summit on environmental literacy, a session on regional school examples by a representative of the North American Association for Environmental Education, discussions on workforce development by DOE staff and division staff member AshLeigh McKinney, and outdoor experiences led by interpretive program manager Richard Julian. The theme of the day was "Turning Conversations into Action," and outcomes included great network connections, a follow-up meeting in October to look at data and renaming the group to Delaware Environmental Literacy and Workforce Network (DELWN).

# Interpretive Exhibits and Publications

## White Clay Creek Nature Center

The Nature Center/Museum at White Clay Creek has officially closed as the park prepares for the Creekside Discovery Center. A ground-breaking ceremony was held on Aug. 24. The new exhibits are currently in design review with the Gecko group, whose exhibits portfolio includes the Audubon Museum and the orientation room at Winterthur Museum.

## Interpretive Waysides and Signage

The Delaware State Parks Exhibits team, Teresa Pierce and Kailene Guerzini, visited several parks over the last few months to review existing exhibits, waysides and other interpretive signage, as well as to identify future signage and exhibit projects. In August, they visited Fort Delaware, Fort DuPont, Port Penn and First State Heritage Park. In September, site visits included Bellevue, Fox Point, Killens Pond and Auburn Valley. From July to September, 25 wayside panels have been redesigned or reprinted. A major upgrade and overhaul of trail interpretive waysides was completed utilizing authorized RTP funding.

## Administration and Data

**2026 Interpretive Leadership Retreat**
The Interpretive Leadership Team is made up of interpretive program managers across Delaware State Parks along with the central interpretive services team. Held for the third consecutive year at the Biden Environmental Center on Sept. 9-10, the annual retreat provided an opportunity for the team to reconnect, align on priorities and plan for the year ahead. This year included focused discussions on youth programming, leadership roles and

interpretive leadership committees. The event continues to be a space for thoughtful conversation, renewed camaraderie and meaningful program planning. Special thanks to teams from Cape Henlopen and the Biden Environmental Center for their hospitality and to Richard Julian for offering an evening beach wagon ride.

**Programming Feedback**

- 443 Online Feedback Submissions were received during July, August and September.
- 92% of participants rated their enjoyment of the program 4 or 5 out of 5 stars.
- 51% were first-time program attendees.
- 48% of participants heard of the program they attended from the website, making it the most common source for program information.

Many submissions shared additional constructive and complimentary comments. Below are a few highlights:

Seining the Bay: *"Tyler and Sam made the program so memorable for us and our granddaughter. We were able to catch fish, crabs and the highlight was an eel. Everyone had a blast and we will be back with our other grandkids next year. Such a deal for the money and something our granddaughter will always remember. Thanks again to Tyler and Sam. So much fun."*

Pontoon Boat Tour: *"This tour was excellent! There was a relaxing ride on the pond and into the swamp with wonderful narration by the park staffer, Diane. I learned a lot and we saw some wonderful sights."*

## Delaware State Parks Passport Program

The Delaware State Parks Passport Program invites participants to embark on adventures throughout the park system, and the summer season offers a fantastic opportunity to make significant progress on their checklists. Highlights from this summer include images of participants exploring nature centers, historic sites, preserves and waysides, as well as volunteering and attending evening programs and concerts. Over 62 people are participating, and three have completed the challenge, earning a free Annual Park Pass and other great prizes. The program runs through Nov. 30, and full details are available at destateparks.com/passport.

## Paddle Quest

Delaware State Parks began a new initiative in 2026, Paddle Quest! Paddle Quest is a seasonal initiative geared towards promoting safe paddling practices and exploring waterways within Delaware State Parks. Participants were asked to visit participating parks and document themselves in a watercraft while wearing a personal floatation device and maintaining best paddling practices. Participating parks are Delaware Seashore, Killens Pond, Lums Pond and Trap Pond. A total of 29 visitors participated in the program, and 20 completed all quests.

## Volunteer and Community Involvement

**Key Highlights**

- From July through September, volunteers supporting the division contributed 14,577 reported hours across park-based volunteer programs and the Campground Host Program, bringing the year-to-date total to 49,321 hours. Cape Henlopen recorded 4,996 volunteer hours during the quarter, followed by the Campground Host Program with 2,675 hours, White Clay Creek with 1,236 hours and Auburn Valley with 1,200 hours.
- On Sept. 19, 357 volunteers contributed 1,071 volunteer hours to the annual Delaware Coastal Cleanup at Cape Henlopen, Delaware Seashore and Fox Point.
- Delaware State Parks Friends groups and partner organizations secured $398,750 through two state funding programs during the quarter. Seven organizations received a combined $198,750 through Delaware General Assembly Grant-in-Aid, while Friends of Lums Pond and Trap Pond Partners each received $100,000 through the Community Reinvestment Fund for park improvement projects.

## Workforce Development and Career Pathways

- The 2026 Delaware State Parks Internship Program supported 43 interns representing 16 states and 27 colleges and universities. Interns gained hands-on experience across Delaware State Parks in conservation, interpretation, recreation, natural resource management, park operations and public service.
- The 2026 YCC served 37 members between ages 14 and 18 through the program's work, education and career development model.
- On July 27, interns and YCC members participated in the annual summer programs celebration at the Biden Environmental Training Center. Interns presented demonstration-of-learning posters, participants took part in park-themed activities and summer reflections, and DNREC leadership presented completion certificates recognizing their service.
- On July 16 and July 23, five YCC members contributed a combined 42.5 hours at Lums Pond. Members removed invasive Japanese stiltgrass and other invasive plants along the Mile Loop Trail, installed two fishing-line collection stations in Area 2 and refurbished mobile benches for visitor use.

## Volunteer Engagement and Stewardship

- On Aug. 19, 41 University of Delaware students contributed 164 volunteer hours at Wilmington State Parks removing brush and invasive plants around the Swinging Bridge and Habitat Hill area. On Aug. 28, 12 Bank of America volunteers contributed an additional 24 hours removing mugwort from the habitat area. Together, the groups contributed 188 hours toward restoring the site and improving growing conditions for native milkweed and other vegetation.

- Litter cleanup projects engaged volunteers throughout Delaware State Parks. Between July and August, 30 volunteers participated in five Shoreline Sweep projects at Cape Henlopen and Delaware Seashore, contributing 30 hours. On July 22, 18 Atlas Restaurant Group volunteers contributed 18 hours during a litter cleanup at Delaware Seashore. On Sept. 13, 46 volunteers from the 36 Air Force Squadron contributed 54 hours cleaning the Sports Complex area at Killens Pond following a large cross-country meet.
- School and youth organizations supported park stewardship projects throughout the quarter. NETWORKS participants contributed 24.5 hours assisting with maintenance at Fort Delaware; 10 participants from Child Inc. contributed 15 hours during a litter cleanup at Lums Pond, and 19 Camp Turnaround participants contributed 19 hours cleaning Trap Pond's picnic area. On Sept. 18, 30 ninth-grade students from the Wilmington Friends School contributed 90 hours at Alapocas Run and removed more than 15 bags of invasive Japanese stiltgrass from Alapocas Woods.
- Trail stewardship programs continued supporting regular maintenance throughout the park system. Public Trail Trimming volunteers contributed 39.75 hours at Lums Pond, while Adopt-a-Trail volunteers contributed 54 hours at Trap Pond. At Brandywine Creek, new volunteer assignments resulted in every trail having at least one Adopt-a-Trail volunteer assigned for the season.
- On Sept. 5, 19 volunteers contributed 38 hours at the Judge Morris Estate at White Clay Creek transplanting plants from the former pollinator garden and establishing plantings in the meadow.
- On July 23, seven Scout volunteers contributed 12.25 hours at Trap Pond removing invasive Japanese stiltgrass while camping at the park.
- On Aug. 23, Eagle Scout Ryan Taylor completed a service project at Killens Pond that replaced banner boards at both the park entrance and campground entrance.
- On Sept. 17, eight Bank of America volunteers contributed 16 hours removing invasive plants from the Area 1 bioswale at Lums Pond.

## Volunteer Programs, Events and Community Engagement

- Campground Hosts contributed 2,675 volunteer hours during the quarter and 12,214 hours year-to-date, supporting campground operations and visitor services throughout Delaware State Parks.
- Between June 9 and Aug. 21, 24 teens contributed 902 hours through the Brandywine Zoo VolunTEEN Program. Participants cared for goats and managed the goat touch yard, interpreted conservation messages for visitors and supported summer camps. The cumulative total includes the program's June launch and continued service through August.
- Between July 10 and Sept. 16, 15 Brandywine Zoo docents contributed 153 volunteer hours providing animal and conservation interpretation to zoo visitors.
- Volunteer historical interpreters supported public programming at Fort Delaware throughout the quarter. Members of the 114th Pennsylvania reenactment group provided special interpretation on Aug.15-16, while Detachment U.S. Engineers

returned Sept. 12-13 to demonstrate the tools, techniques and historical roles associated with construction of Fort Delaware. Volunteers also contributed 20 hours to the Living History Interpretation Program at First State Heritage Park between July and September.

## Strategic Partnerships and Community Outreach

- From July 27-30, up to 10 participants from the Delaware Department of Labor, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation contributed 64.5 volunteer hours at Trap Pond. Participants completed litter removal, invasive Japanese stiltgrass removal, pavilion maintenance and trail work.
- On Sept. 4, DNREC partnered with Bank of America on a Coastal Cleanup project at Battery Park in New Castle. Forty volunteers participated in the two-hour session and collected 181 bags of trash.
- Restoration volunteers at the Judge Morris Estate in White Clay Creek sustained weekly stewardship throughout the quarter, with at least 74 volunteer engagements documented across five major workdays. Regular volunteers and teams from Eastern Shore Natural Gas/Chesapeake Utilities and Bank of America removed stiltgrass, mile-a-minute, wineberry and linden viburnum before these invasive species could spread, protecting native vegetation and putty-root orchids. Volunteers also relocated the former pollinator garden and established sun- and shade-tolerant native plantings in the meadow. Two September projects alone generated 58 volunteer hours.

## Friends Groups and Community Support Organizations

- Delaware State Parks Friends groups and partner organizations received a combined $198,750 through the Delaware General Assembly Grant-in-Aid program. Awards included $15,750 for the Delaware Zoological Society, $18,000 for the Fort Delaware Society, $120,000 for the Fort Miles Historical Association, $5,000 for the Friends of Auburn Heights Preserve, $5,000 for the Friends of White Clay Creek, $30,000 for the Friends of Wilmington Parks and $5,000 for the Port Penn Historical Society.
- Two community support organizations received a combined $200,000 through the Community Reinvestment Fund. Friends of Lums Pond received $100,000 to support an adaptive kayak launch at the park. Trap Pond Partners received $100,000 to support interior restoration of the historic Jason Beach restroom and paving repairs to the campground entrance road at Trap Pond.
- On Sept. 19, Friends of Cape Henlopen held its 19th Annual Chocolate Tasting at Cape Henlopen State Park. Proceeds support the Thatcher Education Fund, which has helped more than 1,000 students participate in nature-based educational programming. The Friends also supported volunteer participation in DNREC's annual Coastal Cleanup that morning.
- During August, Friends of Wilmington Parks partnered with Delaware State Parks to present three free Summer Concert Series performances at Rockford Park. The

organization also supported Shakespeare at the Sugar Bowl on Sept. 11, continuing its role in providing community arts and recreation programming within Wilmington State Parks.

- Friends of Auburn Heights continued public history programming at Auburn Valley through Steamin' Days during the third quarter and participated in Red Clay Day on Sept. 20, connecting visitors with the history, natural resources and recreational opportunities in the area.
- On Sept. 26, Trap Pond Partners hosted its ninth annual Beer, Wine and Spirits Festival at Trap Pond. The fundraiser featured local and regional breweries, wineries and distilleries and supported projects and programs at the park.
- On Sept. 23, the Friends of Bellevue held its annual meeting and historical presentation featuring a tour and interpretation of the restored Mount Pleasant Schoolhouse. The program connected the group's long-term historic preservation work with expanded public interpretation at Bellevue.
- On Sept. 5, the Fort Miles Historical Association and Delaware State Parks held a Victory over Japan Day ceremony honoring Delaware service members who died during World War II, recognizing World War II veterans and commemorating the 10th anniversary of the USS Missouri 16-inch gun display.
- Friends of Cape Henlopen organized two Trails Day projects in the third quarter. On July 11, 24 volunteers contributed 48 hours and collected approximately 75 pounds of trash. On Aug. 8, 20 volunteers contributed 40 hours and collected approximately 20 pounds of trash while trimming vegetation and cleaning trails and parking areas. Combined, the projects generated 88 volunteer hours and removed approximately 95 pounds of trash.
- Friends of White Clay Creek installed four benches in the Carpenter Recreation Area concert area through a $4,751 grant from the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP).
- Friends of White Clay Creek received $5,000 through Grant-in-Aid to support an environmental education position and submitted a $3,900 Sustainable Communities Grant request for a path, pollinator garden and bench near Possum Hill.
- Friends of Lums Pond accumulated scholarship funding to support youth access to park programming. Park staff began coordinating with the organization to develop a plan for using the funds.
- Friends of Holts Landing supported Family Fun Nights on July 7, July 28 and Aug. 11 by coordinating activities, operating the grill and concessions and providing cornhole, horseshoes and visitor engagement.
- On July 9, Friends of Killens Pond mulched the park's main entrance and inspected water bars along the Pondside Trail.
- In September, the Fort Miles Historical Association and the division fully executed an updated memorandum of agreement and premise agreement, formally renewing the organization's partnership with the division and clarifying responsibilities for museum operations, interpretation and programming at Fort Miles.

- Delaware State Parks presented approximately 50 free summer concerts at Bellevue, Holts Landing, Killens Pond, Trap Pond, White Clay Creek and Wilmington state parks. Friends groups from Bellevue, Holts Landing, Trap Pond, White Clay Creek and Wilmington State Parks supported the series through event coordination, equipment, concessions, beverage sales and fundraising.

## Grants and Funding Support

The division submitted a 2026 Hearts of STIHL grant application to support the purchase and installation of three hunting blinds at Lums Pond, Killens Pond and Trap Pond that would be wheelchair accessible and located at ground level. The proposed project would expand accessible outdoor recreation opportunities for visitors with disabilities.
In September, the Fort Delaware Society submitted a $60,000 Crystal Trust Foundation grant application to support construction of the carriage and chassis for the fort's 8-inch Columbiad cannon.

# Environmental Stewardship Program

## Invasive Species Management

Treating invasive species in Delaware State Parks is a never-ending endeavor. Over the summer and into the fall, crews treated a wide range of invasive species, including bamboo, chocolate vine, Canada thistle, wavyleaf basket grass (in First State National Heritage Park adjacent to Brandywine Creek), Japanese knotweed, mile-a-minute, perilla mint, tree of heaven, alligator weed, weeping lovegrass, Japanese stilt grass, Asiatic bittersweet, bush honeysuckle and Asian sand sedge.
A highlight of invasive efforts was removal of invasive woodies and vines swallowing a patch of the rare shrub Viburnum lentago (with only six known sites in the state) that was discovered last year in White Clay Creek.

## Stewardship Program Interns

Five interns assisted Environmental Stewardship staff this summer, finishing up in late August.

## Pea Patch Heronry

The final evening heron count of 2026 took place on Wednesday, Aug. 26. This year's August count was unusually low. A total of 286 birds were recorded, which is less than half the average of 627 birds from all previous August counts, and only a little more than half of the typical (median) count of 550. Only four species were seen. That has happened just once before, in 2007, when 382 birds were counted. This was also the first August count in which no cattle egrets were recorded.

The little blue heron was once again the most common bird, with 141 counted, though that is still roughly half the usual number of about 260. The count included 118 great egrets, far more than are normally seen, and 20 snowy egrets, which is also above average. Only two great blue herons flew in, which is typical for this species. Finally, five birds were white herons that passed too quickly or too far away to be identified; this number is usually higher.

## Deer Management Program

The 2026-27 hunting season began on Tuesday, Sept. 1. Over the summer old wooden stands were replaced in the Fresh Pond section of Delaware Seashore. Stands at that location were also reduced from 10 to nine. At the Deshields Tract at Trap Pond six new wooden stands were added, including two stands for permanently disabled hunters,11 archery/shotgun pins, three archery/shotgun hunting zones and a new tag board. Trap Pond maintenance staff constructed two parking areas and a new gate.

This is the third year of online permit sales. As of Sept. 15, 2,371 permits were purchased. Of that total 1,685 were purchased online, 601 were purchased at an agent location and 85 were purchased at the license desk at the central office in Dover. Evaluating 2025-26 permit sales by age, more than 50% of park permits were sold to hunters between 19 and 39 years of age. This skews a bit younger than the average age of all Delaware hunters. It appears that Delaware State Parks are important in providing public hunting access to younger hunters.

# Enforcement

## Delaware Natural Resources Police (DNRP)

Over the summer, state parks officers, Park Watch volunteers and seasonal patrol officers conducted five surf-fishing courtesy checks. In total, 275 vehicles were checked, and 48 were turned away for noncompliance. The most common reason was not having a reservation, followed by not having the required safety equipment. The number of vehicles checked has dropped dramatically since reservations were introduced. Before then, officers sometimes checked 300 to 400 vehicles in just two hours; this year, the most checked in a single day was 142.

On Monday, July 6, at about 1:45 a.m., State Parks officers were preparing to go off shift when they heard of a vehicle pursuit heading north from Fenwick Island that had started in Ocean City, Maryland. As the Fenwick Island Police Department (PD) continued the pursuit, the driver became increasingly reckless and began driving north in the southbound lanes of Route 1. Natural Resources Police officers responded and tried to stop all southbound traffic to prevent a collision. The vehicle made a U-turn, struck road signs in the median at Savages Ditch, then continued south and turned into the south campground at Delaware Seashore. After looping through the campground, the driver came back out

onto the South Inlet roadway and drove through the culverts around police cars blocking the road, nearly striking officers.

Officers followed the vehicle through the culverts and, along with the Dewey Beach PD, continued the pursuit past South Inlet and back onto Route 1. The driver then headed south in the northbound lanes at high speed until reaching the 3Rs area, where he crossed the median again. Ocean View PD was waiting with spike strips, which disabled the vehicle's front right tire. The vehicle stopped about two miles south of the Inlet Bridge, and the driver fled on foot.

Through their investigation, state parks officers learned that the vehicle had been stolen from campsite 57 at Delaware Seashore at around 1 a.m. The doors were unlocked, the keys were on the seat, and the owners had no idea the car was gone. The driver turned out to be a 13-year-old boy staying at an unrelated campsite in the park, who left behind a phone with a picture of himself on the floor of the stolen car. The boy had been arrested for the same offense in May, when he rammed Delaware State Police vehicles. He was not found that night, but his father later called 911 to report that his son had returned and brought him to South Inlet, where state parks officers and Delaware State Police met at about 6 a.m. While processing the juvenile, officers discovered that he had stolen another vehicle to get back to the campground that morning.

Evan Strickland graduated from the Delaware State Police Academy in August and will be in field training until early December. Evan holds an associate degree in criminal justice and previously worked as a seasonal patrol officer with the Fish and Wildlife Unit, as well as full-time with Fleet Services. Once he completes field training, he will be assigned to Killens Pond.

On Friday, Aug. 14, park patrons lost their dog, Vinny, near New Road and Key Box Road at Delaware Seashore. The owners called a drone recovery company from Maryland, which responded with a thermal-imaging drone. The drone located Vinny, and park patrol officers helped return him to his owners. This was DNRP’s first successful use of a drone in a search and rescue.

On Aug. 23, a hunter volunteer reported a gunshot near archery pin BB at White Clay Creek. The volunteer described a male and a female subject who were in the area when the shot was heard, with the man carrying a satchel. Officers found the pair near the BB parking area. The man was uncooperative when stopped, refused to allow a pat-down and tried to pull away while being detained, but he was quickly taken into custody after a brief scuffle. Inside the satchel, officers found a loaded Glock 30, .45-caliber pistol with 12 rounds, including one in the chamber. The gun had been fitted with a "switch" that made it fully automatic, and its serial number had been obliterated. The man refused to identify himself at the scene but gave his name to officers after being transported to the University of Delaware Police Department. He was on probation and prohibited from possessing a firearm because of a previous firearms conviction in New Jersey. He was charged with possession of a firearm by a person prohibited, possession of a firearm with an obliterated

serial number, possession of a destructive weapon, carrying a concealed deadly weapon, resisting arrest and discharging a firearm on park land.

On Sept. 7, State Parks officers encountered a serial wildlife offender near Fresh Pond at Delaware Seashore. He was harvesting crabs and clams in a prohibited area and had undersized crabs and clams in his possession. He was issued more than $2,000 in fines and was taken into custody as he was wanted by another police agency.

In late September, K9 Vos, an 11-year-old Belgian Malinois, passed away unexpectedly of an unforeseen medical illness. Vos began his career with the Delaware Natural Resources Police in 2018 and was partnered with Master Corporal John Lister. Dually certified in patrol and narcotics detection, K9 Vos contributed to numerous arrests over his eight-year career. His name came from the reddish color of his coat, as "vos" is the Dutch word for fox. K9 Vos was also highly engaged in community outreach and was a crowd favorite at local school visits and public safety demonstrations, where he helped bridge the gap between law enforcement and the community. A deeply valued member of the NRP family, he was honored for his dedicated service and is tremendously missed.

## Special Duty

There were 271 Special Duty hours worked this quarter, with 191.5 in the northern region (with 111 of those worked at events held at Abessinio Stadium), 66 in the inland region and 13.5 in the southern region.

## Beach Patrol

This season guards performed 131 rescues and 157 assists, responded to 456 minor medical incidents and handled 72 major medical cases (in which the patient was transported by Emergency Medical Services (EMS).) They also located 56 missing persons.

Through Dine to Donate Events, the Big Chill Beach Club raised $1,000 which will go to support the Delaware State Beach Patrol. The donation was presented to Bailey Noel, beach patrol captain and other members of his team on Thursday, July 30, at the Big Chill Beach Club.

For the third straight year, the Sussex County Lifesaving Association took home the national championship at the U.S. Lifesaving Association's annual competition, with major wins by the Delaware State Beach Patrol.

More than 120 lifeguards from the Sussex County association competed, and 26 Delaware State Beach Patrol members finished in the top three in several categories. Coleman Woodard led the Sussex County men's team in points for the third year running and placed fourth nationally overall. On the women's side, Grace McManis was Sussex County's top performer and finished fourth in the overall standings.

DNREC Secretary Greg Patterson praised the guards for putting Delaware on the map nationally while also keeping state park beachgoers safe all summer, noting that they've excelled at both.

Two lifeguards, Elizabeth Fry and Coleman Woodard, have been invited to compete with the U.S. National Team in the Lifesaving World Championships taking place in Port Elizabeth, South Africa.

# Planning, Preservation and Development
**Brooks Cahall**

# Land Preservation Office (LPO)

## Open Space Program
The Open Space Council quarterly meeting was held on Sept. 2. There were two Open Space Program projects completed.

The potential balance of the Open Space Program Fund, including encumbered funds, is $10,875,402. This amount includes the anticipated FY27 Open Space funds of $9 million, expected to be received on or before Dec. 15, and anticipated grant funds from the Conservation Fund for the DuPont-Langenegger property in the amount of $1,455,000, expected to be received by November.

The next quarterly meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, Dec. 16, at 9:00 a.m. in the Senate Hearing Room at Legislative Hall.

## Easements and Agreements
The division has not entered into any easements or agreements this past quarter.

# Office of Nature Preserves (ONP)

## Natural Areas Preservation Program
The Natural Areas Advisory Council met on Sept. 10. The council considered a de-listing request from a landowner in New Castle County who wished to remove her property from the Frenchtown Woods Natural Area. The council recommended that the Secretary deny the request.

The Office of Nature Preserves did not finalize any changes to the Natural Areas Registry or nature preserve dedications this quarter.

# Cultural Resources Unit

## Administrative
**Cultural Resources Unit (CRU) Summer Interns**
The CRU hosted a Lyman Stewart intern from the University of Delaware and a Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) intern from June 8 through Aug. 7. The Lyman Stewart intern assisted in a variety of tasks that included creating an inventory of the backlog of

previously unprocessed artifacts, conducting pedestrian and shovel test pit surveys and learning about cultural stewardship practices within the parks. The YCC intern primarily assisted the division's curator in selecting, organizing and managing the general collection and processing archival collections.

**YCC Education Day**
The CRU hosted the division's YCC members at Bethesda Church and Cemetery in Trap Pond State Park for an Education Day on July 13 to highlight cemetery conservation work. YCC staff assisted the CRU in documenting all headstones, updated management reports in the division's cemetery database and participated in hands-on conservation work by scrubbing each headstone and applying D2 cleaning solution.

**Historic Weapons Program**
The Historic Weapons Program obtained six new weapons for Fort Delaware State Park for use in small arms demonstrations. The weapons were thoroughly researched to ensure the exact rifles and smoothbore muskets purchased had been present at Fort Delaware during the Civil War. The Historic Weapons Safety Committee also completed facility and demonstration inspections at all three sites conducting historic weapons programs.

**Lums Mill House**
The western-facing portion of the Lums Mill House completely collapsed in early August following severe weather that moved through Lums Pond State Park. The division plans to conduct a controlled demolition of the eastern-facing portion of the house, preserving stable components of the remaining corners and facades up to the sill of the first floor windows and doors that remain intact. Following the controlled demolition, the structure will then be brick pointed to stabilize the remaining features that can be interpreted using waysides detailing the milling history of Lums Pond.

**Historic Conservation Workshop**
Staff from CRU, maintenance and the division's historic trades specialist are developing an internal division training highlighting historic conservation and preservation techniques via pre-recorded videos and hands-on training. Conservation work will include brick pointing, window repair, plaster work and general masonry repair. The recording sessions on various aspects of historic conservation and maintenance repair began in October, with the hands-on training scheduled for spring 2027.

## Archaeology

**Brandywine Creek State Park Collection**
As part of the ongoing consolidation of division collections, CRU coordinated with Brandywine Creek State Park to transfer all archaeological artifacts found on site to the central repository. All artifacts from the park were fully identified and inventoried, with a portion formally accessioned into the collection. The accession process includes photographing each item, assigning an accession number and adding the item to PastPerfect.

**Bellevue Pavilion Phase I Survey**
Prior to the construction of a pavilion meeting Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards at Bellevue State Park, staff conducted a Phase I survey of the proposed project area. The proposed area of potential effect (APE) is located within an area of high archaeological potential for an 18th century settlement. Material recovered from the survey is believed to be associated with the greenhouse historically present in the area during the du Pont era of ownership.

**Trap Pond EDA Phase IA Survey**
As part of the Section 106 requirements for the ongoing U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) grant to design campground and dock improvements, CRU conducted a pedestrian survey at Trap Pond State Park. The area of potential effect (APE) for the proposed project is highly sensitive and likely to yield archaeological material and will therefore be subject to archaeological monitoring and/or further testing.

**Killens Pond Salvage Excavation**
In late August, division staff were alerted to artifacts found along a trail in Killens Pond State Park. The trail location featured significant erosion within an area coinciding with a previously identified precontact site (Site #7K-E-163). A potential hearth feature was also identified on the trail surface due to heavy erosion in the area. A salvage excavation of the identified feature was organized utilizing staff from the CRU and the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) as well as Archaeological Society of Delaware (ASD) volunteers. Pinpointed shovel test pits were also placed to gain a better understanding of the size and density of the site. Coordination with the park and the division's Trail Committee will determine next steps to mitigate erosion to the area.

**Donations**
The division curator facilitated a donation to the Fort Miles collection associated with Cape Henlopen State Park including several uniforms from various soldiers stationed at Fort Miles between 1939 and 1990. The CRU began the process of accessioning the uniforms and ephemera into the collection. The division also received a donation of Fort Miles photographs from the 1950s associated with the development of the Regional Capital Assistance Team (RCAT) program. As the photos received were negatives, staff processed each image by scanning the negative and converting it into positive images that will be used for research and interpretation of post-World War II Fort Miles.

**Curation**
The division curator, along with three division interns, rehoused several historical uniforms and textiles in the collection. Following a request by the division's interpretive program managers for textiles training for summer interns, CRU coordinated a two-day training on conserving and rehousing textiles. Seven uniforms associated with Fort Miles were placed into acid-free textile boxes, and two American flags were rolled on oversized acid-free tubing. All information associated with each piece was updated and added to the division's collections database.

**Division 75th and 250th Exhibits**
The CRU, along with the folkart specialist and programming exhibits coordinator, installed an exhibit at the Blue Ball Barn to highlight the 75th anniversary of Delaware State Parks for the month of July. The exhibit comprised a collection of objects from each park and highlighted key themes that reflect the history of each site. Objects included a surgeon's kit from Fort Delaware, a National Vulcanized Fiber (NVF) hard hat from Auburn Valley and a Lyle gun projectile from the Indian River Life Saving Station.

An exhibit was also installed at First State Heritage Park within the John Bell House in preparation for the July 4 weekend and the 250th anniversary of the United States. The exhibit featured Revolutionary War-era objects from the division's collection and included a 1770s cannonball from Alapocas Run, a replica of the 1789 George Washington Inaugural Button found at Weldin Ruins, colonial currency from Auburn Valley and 18th and 19th century ceramic found in the backyard of the John Bell House.

## Resident Curatorship Program

**Buck Jersey Tavern**
Staff from CRU and Lums Pond State Park coordinated a site visit and house tour of the Buck Jersey Tavern with the current tenants to ensure all program requirements were met. Future programming opportunities at the site were discussed including a Lums Pond history program that would highlight the Buck Jersey Tavern, Lums Mill House site and general history of Lums Pond.

## Park Planning

**Zoo Facilities and Management Plan**
A pop-up public workshop took place on July 23 in conjunction with the ribbon cutting and Sip and Stroll programs at the Brandywine Zoo. A presentation of plan highlights will take place during the November meeting. A presentation was made to the Delaware Zoological Society board during its Oct. 14 meeting, and a public workshop will take place in early November. This plan is required to meet the accreditation requirements of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA).

## Grants

**Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Grant Program**
Division interns visited more than 120 parks this summer in support of Delaware's post-compliance stewardship program, where the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC) must ensure that funded parklands remain parks in perpetuity, identifying both facility and property boundary concerns.

DNREC is working on applications for the National Park Service Outdoor Recreation Legacy Program, a nationally competitive LWCF funding opportunity. Grants are being applied for on behalf of local communities as well as in support of rehabilitation at H.

Fletcher Brown Park, a component of Wilmington State Parks. Division staff reached out to all eligible municipalities and four are currently considering an application. Local applicants had until Oct. 1 to submit their application to DNREC with a final submission deadline of Nov. 1.

## Recreational Trails Program (RTP)

The Recreational Trails Program Advisory Group had a successful meeting at Lums Pond State Park on Sept. 10. The meeting included a visit to one of the bridges reconstructed using RTP funds on the Swamp Forest Trail in 2025, as well as to the campground, where they discussed the EDA-funded plans for expansion and visited work-in-progress on the new campground cabins. The group meets annually as a requirement of Delaware's receipt of RTP funds from the Federal Highway Administration and continues to look for new members to represent all trail users – walkers, hikers, bicyclists, equestrians, paddlers and motorized trail users.

## Outdoor Recreation, Parks and Trails Grant (ORPT) Program

Full applications are under review for the 2026 grant cycle with requested funds exceeding the program budget by a small margin. The project review panel met in October to discuss funding distribution for the matching grant program. The program has a record budget of nearly $2.4 million, and initial recommendations will be presented to the council at the November meeting. Thank you again to council members Joe Smack, Andrew Martin, Chuck Hecker, Keely Milbourne, Joe O'Neill and Jan Durham for volunteering to be on the review panel.

# Office of Design and Development

## Capital Project Updates

**Projects Completed in the Third Quarter of 2026 (3)**

- North Park Drive Sidewalk (WSP)
- New Clubhouse at Garrisons Lake Golf Club (GLGC)
- Mixed Species Exhibit (Zoo)

**Active Construction Projects (14)**

These projects are in the bidding, contracting and constructing phases.

- Cypress Splash Zone (TPSP)
- New Cabins (LPSP)
- Benge Road Pump Station (AVSP)
- Bulkhead, Piling Repairs (IRM)
- Pier Repairs (FDSP)
- Point Trail (CHSP)
- Bridge Replacement (WCCSP)
- New Nature Center (WCCSP)

- Office Trailer Move (CHSP from GLGC)
- Playground Replacement (FPSP)
- Fort Miles Museum Addition (CHSP)
- Kiddie Pool Repairs (KPSP)
- Mill House Demolition/Interpretation (LPSP)
- Pavement Rehabilitation (CHSP)

**Active Design Projects (25)**
These projects are in concept design, schematic design, design development, construction documentation and permitting phases.

- Snuff Mill Trail (AVSP)
- Yorklyn Trail (AVSP)
- H. Fletcher Brown Park Phase II (WSP)
- Sarah Brooks House Sewer Connection (BVSP)
- Wheelright Trail (BCSP)
- Cape Sewer Connection to Lewes (CHSP)
- ADA Pavilion/Restroom, Concert Pad (BVSP)
- Septic Renovation (HLSP)
- Courtesy Dock (LPSP)
- Buck Jersey Connector (LPSP)
- Recreation of Dam, Big Pond (WCCSP)
- Judge Morris Estate Sewer Connection (WCCSP)
- Trail Bridge Assessments (Statewide)
- Playground Replacement (KPSP)
- Fishing Pier (CHSP)
- Fenwick Island Lighthouse Parking Lot (FISP)
- Entrance Road, Fee Booth Improvements (LPSP)
- McBride Bathhouse Renovation (CHSP)
- Tower Road Bathhouse Renovation (DSSP)
- Fenwick Island Bathhouse Renovation (FISP)
- Waste Water Treatment Plant/Sewer Connection (LPSP)
- Niven House Renovation (WCCSP)
- Water System Improvements (CHSP)
- Gordon's Pond Trail Second Span (CHSP)
- Lamborn Driveway Repairs (WCCSP)

**Active Planning Projects (3)**
These projects are in the project initiation and planning phases.

- New Acquisition Parking/Trailhead (WCCSP)
- Entrance Trail Reroute (CHSP)
- Wi-Fi at Campground (LPSP)

**Technical Assistance and Consultation Projects (7)**
These are projects where the Office of Design and Development is offering assistance or coordinating projects that are not capital improvements for the Division of Parks and Recreation.

- Dam 7 Removal (WCCSP)
- Accreditation Improvements (Zoo)
- Judge Morris Estate Concessionaire Improvements (WCCSP)
- Orientation Building (CHSP)
- Lums Pond Resource, Conservation and Development (RC&D) Project with New Castle Conservation District (LPSP)
- Arts Center Repairs (BVSP)
- Fort Delaware Office and Maintenance Move (FDSP)

**Projects on Hold (7)**
The division continues to pursue these projects, but they are not active at this time.

- EDA suite of designed projects (Statewide)
- Maxwell House Office Conversion (WCCSP)
- Wolfe Neck Trail (CHSP)
- New Maintenance Building (BVSP)
- New Park Office (CHSP)
- New Park Entrance (CHSP)
- Youth Camp II Conversion (CHSP)

**Key to Capital Project Updates:** ARSP=Alapocas Run State Park; AVSP=Auburn Valley State Park; BVSP=Bellevue State Park; BCSP=Brandywine Creek State Park; CHSP=Cape Henlopen State Park; DSSP=Delaware Seashore State Park; FDSP=Fort Delaware State Park; FISP=Fenwick Island State Park; FPSP=Fox Point State Park; GLGC=Garrisons Lake Golf Club; HLSP=Holts Landing State Park; IRM=Indian River Marina; KPSP=Killens Pond State Park; LPSP=Lums Pond State Park; TPSP=Trap Pond State Park; WCCSP=White Clay Creek State Park; WSP=Wilmington State Parks; Zoo=Brandywine Zoo

## Alapocas Run and Wilmington State Parks

**H. Fletcher Brown Park – Design**
The project started with the demolition of a dilapidated pavilion structure and stairways. Then a conceptual redesign of the park was created to be more welcoming and better address drainage. The division's consultant is proceeding with design development, with cost estimation and construction documents expected to be completed by spring 2027.

## Brandywine Zoo

**Mixed Species Exhibit – Complete**
Division staff assisted with the design to revise an animal exhibit area within the zoo. The Delaware Zoological Society (DZS) managed the larger project. Unfortunately, their costs were greater than the available funding. DZS received legislative permission for money

originally intended for accreditation improvements to be shifted to their project. The division continued to provide technical support in the construction phase, which finished in June.

## Cape Henlopen State Park

**Fishing Pier – Design**

Following an annual need for repairs or closure of additional sections of pier, division staff coordinated a planning effort for pier replacement. A marine engineering consultant was recently hired to initiate design, including some evaluation of design alternatives and cost estimates through conceptual design. This process will likely be completed in March 2027 and will be critical to guide decision-making and accurate budget requests.

**Point Trail – Construction**

The division worked with an engineering consultant to design an accessible trail connecting the main bathhouse parking lot area and bike loop trail to the Point Comfort Station parking area. The construction contract was awarded, and work started in September with the hope of being completed by years' end. Design and construction funding is 80% from the Delaware Department of Transportation's (DelDOT) RTP program.

**Office Trailer Move – Construction**

With the completion of the new clubhouse at Garrisons Lake Golf Course, the temporary trailer previously used for golf course sales/office during construction has been moved to Cape Henlopen State Park. It will supplement staff offices and will be located behind the Officer's Club facility where existing park administrative offices already exist. Some minor sitework and utility connections are being coordinated.

**Fort Miles Museum Addition – Construction**

Following the design process last summer, the division bid a project to accommodate new exhibits and build an addition onto Battery 519 to include reception, restroom and storage areas. However, no bids were received on the project. The division and Fort Miles Museum Board re-evaluated design elements and options for additional funding. The project will be rebid soon.

**Pavement Rehabilitation – Construction**

Deterioration of pavement near the park entrance and along Dune Road necessitates repairs. Division staff will attempt to coordinate sections of roadway improvements in late fall.

**McBride Bathhouse Renovation – Design**

There is a need for improvements for accessibility, space for mixed-gender lifeguard operations, updates to the concession area and revisions and improvements to restrooms, showers and changing facilities. Division efforts intend to combine the design and coordination of this bathhouse renovation with the Tower Road and Fenwick Island

bathhouses. There won't be a cookie-cutter approach but there will be significant efficiencies from combining efforts, and all three facilities have significant needs for improvement.

**Water System Improvements – Design**
The drinking water system has become increasingly problematic to maintain due to numerous piping and valve types dating back to the 1940s. There have been significant and costly leaks, low pressure, increased demand, degradation and more. The division plans to hire a consultant to evaluate the existing system and design an improved system, which is expected to be a complete replacement. This will be a huge task that will likely unfold over multiple years but is a significant need and critical to operations and safety.

**Gordon's Pond Trail Second Boardwalk – Design**
Division staff requested a proposal from a consultant engineering firm to start the design of a new second span of the boardwalk section of the trail. The current boardwalk section has become a bottleneck for trail users and has led to conflicts between users with numerous accidents. Options will be considered, and there will be careful review of environmental and cultural concerns prior to any final design.

**Entrance Trail Reroute – Design/Construction**
Near where the Junction and Breakwater Trail (aka the Lewes-Georgetown Rail Trail) meets the park entrance, the trail enters the shoulder of the roadway in front of SPI Pharma. The division owns the rail corridor through the front of SPI Pharma and will coordinate with them to move their perimeter fence and to construct a trail segment that removes trail users from the roadway.

## Delaware Seashore, Holts Landing and Fenwick Island State Parks

**Tower Road Bathhouse and Fenwick Island Bathhouse Renovations – Design**
There is a need for improvements for accessibility, space for mixed-gender lifeguard operations, updates to the concession area and revisions and improvements to restrooms, showers and changing facilities. On top of these items, Tower Road Bathhouse has serious structural issues, and Fenwick Island has ingress/egress/parking problems. The division intends to combine the design and coordination of these bathhouses with the McBride Bathhouse (CHSP). There won't be a cookie-cutter approach but there will be significant efficiencies from combining efforts, and all three facilities have significant needs for improvement.

**Fenwick Island Lighthouse Parking Lot – Design**
A recent division acquisition of property adjacent to the Fenwick Island Lighthouse, in conjunction with the Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs (HCA), will provide space for Fenwick Island beach parking (Parks) and lighthouse parking (HCA). An engineering consultant is now coordinating with utility providers and updating a site plan to enable staff to coordinate utility removals or relocations and construct parking lot surfacing, signage and related improvements. The complexity of utilities from the former mobile

homes, need for formal stormwater coordination and questions about use have delayed the project.

**Holts Landing Septic – Design**
Holts Landing State Park has had recurring problems with septic system pumps and piping for several years. Staff met to evaluate options. Sussex County has verbally agreed to a sewer connection. Division staff will be hiring an engineering consultant to design the new system and connect to the county's infrastructure.

## Fort Delaware State Park

**Pier Repairs – Design**
An assessment of the piers in the park revealed the need for multiple repairs. Some minor repairs have been completed. There are some pile repairs requiring engineering design, which is currently underway with the goal of having documents for contractors to bid on this fall.

## Garrisons Lake Golf Course

**New Clubhouse and Cart Barn Complex – Complete**
There was a significant design coordination effort for a new clubhouse at the Garrisons Lake Golf Course. A new cart barn was completed in July 2023, and a temporary office trailer was installed to continue golf sales. New fencing and gates were installed around the maintenance yard while the existing clubhouse was demolished. The clubhouse project, including a pro shop and restaurant, began construction in March 2025 and was completed this summer. Some final items and landscaping are being coordinated as the concessionaire moves into the facility. The goal is to hold a grand opening once the site is operating smoothly.

## Indian River Marina

**Marina Bulkhead and Piling Repairs – Construction**
The division had a marine engineering firm assess the condition of the 1,500-foot bulkhead and hundreds of pilings at the marina. Repairs would provide an opportunity for another 25 years of life expectancy. The design was completed, and the division went to bid with prices being much higher than anticipated. Significant construction timing and phasing considerations were incorporated for ease of marina operations. The division decided to reject all bids and make adjustments to the project including simplified coating options and greater scheduling flexibility. Bids for the project were opened Oct. 27.

## Killens Pond State Park

**Kiddie Pool Repairs – Construction**
Following completion of the main pool replacement, the division is funding needed repairs to the kiddie pool. The repairs are intended to fix leaking and piping concerns and replace corroded features.

# Lums Pond State Park

**Lums Pond Cabin Complex – Construction**

A new 14-cabin complex adjacent to the Lums Pond campground is coming soon after significant design and funding challenges. The complex will consist of two- and three-bedroom cabins (two of each size are designed to be fully ADA accessible). Construction began in March 2025. Completion of the first two cabins should occur late this fall, with full project completion anticipated in April 2027.

**Mill House Demolition – Construction**

Historic records indicate this house has been in disrepair since 1967. The division started $250,000 in stabilization and repair efforts in 2023. However, the badly deteriorated structure had a partial wall collapse early in the project. Evaluation by the division architect and structural engineer consultant determined the structure was unsafe for continued repairs and recommended demolition.

After careful documentation by the division's CRU and with the report from the University of Delaware Center for Historic Architecture and Design, the division presented this project to the New Castle County Historic Review Board, which granted approval for demolition earlier this summer. The construction phase has now started with a contractor lined up to do the initial demolition. The perimeter brick wall will be left at a height of roughly five feet to mark window openings. Some masonry stabilization and wayside installation will be subsequent pieces of work to make the area safe and provide interpretation for park visitors and programs.

**Courtesy Dock – Design**

A division engineering consultant is designing a courtesy dock for the public boat ramp. The dock will aid boat launching and include an accessible kayak launch on the opposite side of the dock from the ramp. The consultant also is coordinating required permits. The wetlands permit was denied because the facility (boat ramp and pond as a whole) is classified as a 'marina.' As such, significant work is required with the application and with operation and maintenance. This a concern for other state park ponds as well. After meeting with the Wetlands Program, there was an outlined path forward, but the project has fallen behind schedule.

**Buck Jersey Connector Trail – Design**

After some issues with contractual scope with the consultant engineer, the design development continues. It will provide a paved connector trail between the park entrance and Area 1 (near GoApe!), mostly paralleling the entrance road.

**Wi-Fi at Campground – Planning**

Division staff are working with the Department of Technology and Information to evaluate Wi-Fi connection options at each of the 14 cabins under construction and at the current camp store.

**Sewer Connection – Design**
The division is obtaining a proposal from a consultant engineer to design a sewer connection. Currently the park has its own wastewater treatment facility. That facility requires a consultant operator and has increasingly experienced functionality issues and needed repairs. Some key parts are no longer manufactured. The division plans to connect to county sewer as soon as possible.

## Trap Pond State Park

**Cypress Splash Zone – Construction**
Design started in late 2023 to create a new spray water feature area in Trap Pond State Park. Initial cost estimates were significantly higher than funding available. Design efforts proceeded in hopes of reducing costs. Design also had some delays with geotechnical and stormwater components. The project finally went to bid, and construction started in September 2025. Significant site work delays occurred. Completion is now estimated for late 2026.

## White Clay Creek State Park

**Creekside Discovery Center – Construction**
Planning for a new nature center and improvements to the nature center complex are the top priorities in the White Clay Creek Master Plan. Following an extensive design phase, the project was bid, and construction started in September. In addition to two classrooms that also serve as individual or combined meeting space, elements include new public restrooms, immersive exhibits, increased parking and outdoor programming space. The existing public facilities in this area (parking lot, restrooms and nature center) will be closed to the public during construction, which will last at least 14 months. Trail use along Creek Road/Penn Del Trail will be open as much as possible, but some closures are expected and will be posted in advance.

**Bridge Replacement – Construction**
The division worked with an engineering consultant to design a replacement for the bridge to the nature center adjacent to Hopkins Bridge. The existing wooden bridge has been displaced by flooding multiple times in recent years, and ingress/egress to this area of White Clay Creek State Park is essential to trail users, staff, campers and program groups. It also includes a stream restoration component to safely align the stream away from Hopkins Road. This is funded 80% from DelDOT's RTP. Construction started in September and is expected to be completed at the end of the calendar year. Public vehicle use at this location will be halted until both this and the nature center building projects are complete.

**Niven House Renovation – Design**
The Niven House was last used as a residence but has remained vacant for close to a decade. A previous effort demolished select parts of the interior, but the building is in serious need of repairs. Two attempts to solicit concessionaires for use were unsuccessful. The division has decided to convert this to a rentable cabin. Staff have developed layout

options for accessibility and next steps for phased renovations. Some exterior repairs are currently underway. With additional funding, the full renovation can proceed.

**Recreation of Dam, Big Pond – Design**
The division is working with its engineering consultant on design and permit coordination for the reconstruction of a dam and pond formerly known as "Big Pond." The General Assembly has directed the department to continue efforts to reconstruct the dam and pond. There is a considerable amount of federal and state permit coordination required. The biggest piece is the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) permitting related to wetlands and waterways. An individual permit is required and typically takes multiple years of coordination. The division has officially submitted the individual permit application. An initial site review by the corps has resulted in a request for additional information. A public notice was issued by the USACE with at least 319 comments. Division staff and the consultant are following USACE's direction for next steps.

**Lamborn Estate Driveway – Design**
The General Assembly directed Bond Bill funding for the division to apply on repairing the degraded and eroded driveway. There are three spillways underneath the driveway, and a consultant has been hired to evaluate the site and consider options for designing repairs.

# Administrative Services

## Greg J. Abbott

# Office of Business Services

## Annual Pass and Permit Sales

Pass and permit sales from 12/1/25 through 9/29/26 showed steady year-over-year growth across all categories. Annual pass quantities increased slightly, with a substantial revenue increase from $1.82 million to $2.58 million due to the fee increase. Surf permits rose modestly in both quantity and revenue, reflecting consistent demand. Deauville passes saw a small increase in both sales and revenue. Overall, all pass types experienced positive gains compared to the previous year.

## Daily Entrance Payment Options

Daily entrance revenue in 2026 showed a strong adoption of the new Quick Response (QR) code payment option and the pilot deployment of Clover credit card devices, both of which contributed to more streamlined transactions and improved fee compliance. The QR code usage grew steadily through the summer months, and Clover devices provided a reliable card-based alternative at high-traffic locations. Traditional Parkeon payments remained consistent, while reliance on cash fluctuated with peak visitation periods. Overall, the season demonstrated that offering diverse and convenient payment methods significantly boosts participation and reduces barriers for visitors. Building on this success, both the QR code system and Clover devices are planned for expansion in 2027 to further enhance visitor convenience and strengthen payment compliance.

## Surf Fishing Reservations

Monthly surf fishing reservations for the 2026 season showed strong overall activity during the first full year that reservations were only required on select beaches. Gordons Pond/Herring Point at Cape Henlopen State Park continued to dominate usage, peaking in July and August, while Navy Crossing and Point Crossing saw steady midseason increases. Delaware Seashore 3Rs location also maintained consistent demand throughout the summer. During the reservation period (May through September), total reservations reached 20,316 for the season.

# Legal and Contract Services

## Executed Agreements/Amendments

**Cape Henlopen State Park**

- NAT22012 – Bait & Tackle Shop, Amendment I at Cape Henlopen State Park; Agreement renewed and extended through 3/31/2033, with no remaining renewal periods.
- Fort Miles Agreement; Agreement outlining premises and operations with the Fort Miles Historical Association, Inc., effective for five years from 9/23/2026 to 9/22/2031, with automatic five-year renewals unless terminated.

**Delaware Seashore State Park**

- License Agreement with Center for the Inland Bays, Amendment I; Agreement extended for two years, effective 01/01/2027 through 12/31/2028, with no further extensions available.

**Fenwick Island State Park**

- Professional Services Agreement for Lifeguard Services; Agreement effective 08/20/2026 through 12/31/2029, with one two-year extension available.

**Wilmington State Park**

- Brandywine Farmers Market Special Use Permit; Agreement term 05/29/2026 through 11/01/2029, with one two-year extension available.

**Statewide**

- Boston Beer Corporation dba Dogfish Head Craft Brewery Collaboration Agreement for Delaware State Parks 75th Anniversary beer; Effective 7/31/2026 through 12/31/2026. Delaware Disc Golf Club Memorandum of Agreement; Agreement extended for the term 01/01/2027 through 12/31/2028.

**Request for Proposals (RFP)/Agreements/Amendments in Process:**

- Lums Outdoor Recreation RFP
- Summer Camp Registration Software
- 2026 Agricultural Land Lease RFPs for Trap Pond, White Clay Creek and Auburn Valley State Parks, Fishing/Headboat RFP at Indian River Marina
- Wilmington Flower Market Agreement
- Brandywine Festival of the Arts
- Friends of Wilmington State Parks – Bird Husband's Use Agreement
- Delaware Blue Coats Agreement
- UD Cooperative Extension agreement for Kranz Farm at White Clay Creek
- SPI Pharma at Cape Henlopen Extension
- Project Wet Agreement
- Rehoboth Beach Sailing Association Agreement at Delaware Seashore

# Retail Services

- Park store revenue calendar year 2026 (CY26) Q3 (July-September): $416,984.19 (76,683 items sold)
- Park store revenue calendar year 2026 YEAR-TO-DATE (January-September): $835,468.91 (147,217 items sold)
- Webstore revenue calendar year 2026 Q3 (July-September): $2,543.00 (130 items sold)
- Webstore revenue calendar year 2026 YEAR-TO-DATE (January-September): $6,956.50 (350 items sold)
- Airstream retail revenue calendar year 2026 Q3 (July-September): $13,596.60 (1,433 items sold)
- Airstream retail revenue calendar year 2026 YEAR-TO-DATE (January-September): $19,101.60 (1,945 items sold)
- The DelaWanderer saw another record-breaking year at the Delaware State Fair, which took placed July 23 through Aug 1. Total revenue reached $20,120.10, and 1,515 items were sold between parks merchandise and annual passes.

# Marketing/Social Media

## Collaboration with Dogfish Head

The division is partnering with Dogfish Head through its Beer & Benevolence program on DelaWanderer, a limited-edition IPA created to celebrate Delaware State Parks' 75th anniversary. Featuring cranberries inspired by Cape Henlopen State Park's bog habitat and spruce, the beer is a nod to our airstream and is proposed to launch in early November in extremely limited quantities. Distribution will focus primarily on special events and public relations opportunities, with the partnership centered on storytelling, awareness and engagement rather than broad retail sales.

## High Engagement at Hershey RV Show

In September, staff attended America's Largest RV Show in Hershey, Pennsylvania, one of the nation's premier recreational vehicle and camping events, drawing approximately 65,000 attendees. The division actively engaged with approximately 4,000 people and promoted Delaware State Parks as a premier outdoor recreation destination. Visitor questions and interests have evolved over the years, and this year awareness of the park system was notably high, with conversations focused more on how to get the most from a visit.

## Connecting at MATPRA Media Marketplace

In late September, Delaware State Parks participated in the Mid Atlantic Tourism Public Relations Alliance (MATPRA) media marketplace in Dover, an annual tourism media

relations event that rotates among regional locations and brings together travel journalists and content creators. During the event, the parks team engaged with approximately 60 tourism reporters and creators, sharing story ideas, highlighting park experiences and building relationships that could lead to future media coverage and destination visits. Delaware State Parks was one of the few participating organizations outside the traditional tourism sector, invited through strong partnerships with destination marketing organizations across the state.

## Digital Marketing Helps Drive Summer Attendance and Advance Sellouts

Two targeted digital marketing campaigns supported Killens Pond and Fort Delaware state parks, helping build awareness and drive visitors to experiences with available capacity.

At Killens Pond, a campaign promoted weekday availability at the expanded Waterpark, traditionally a quieter time than weekends. The effort generated a combined 385,124 impressions and 1,983 link clicks, reaching more than 83,000 and 95,000 people across the two campaigns. Weekday Waterpark usage remained extremely strong throughout the summer, helping keep the facility busy beyond its traditional peak periods.

A separate campaign supported an event with Fort Delaware State Park in partnership with Dolly Spankers in Delaware City. The campaign reached 6,868 people, delivered 10,231 impressions and generated 885 link clicks. Demand exceeded expectations, with the promotion selling out further in advance than forecast.
Together, the campaigns show how focused digital marketing can strengthen attendance during softer periods and support revenue-generating programs. The division plans to expand on this strategy in the coming months.

## New Website Success

The Delaware State Parks website, launched in November 2024, is showing substantially stronger use than the previous site during the same seasonal period two years later. Page views increased from 540,529 in 2024 to 1,222,945 in 2026, an increase of approximately 126%. The strongest gains are on pages tied directly to trip planning and park use, including park information, fees, passes and seasonal attractions, suggesting visitors are making significantly greater use of practical planning content. Because some measurements and reporting methods changed with the new site and analytics system, this comparison focuses on page views, which are directly comparable between the two periods. While there are smaller enhancement opportunities, the new site has delivered with improved accessibility, redundancy, data measurement and content-management capability.

## Digital Channels Continue to Deliver Strong Reach

The division continued to maintain a broad digital audience to promote Delaware State

Parks during the third quarter. Facebook and Instagram generated more than 1.07 million views, with a combined audience of nearly 94,000 followers.

Email remained another significant communications channel, with a total newsletter reach of approximately 248,300 subscribers.

## Web Engagement Surges During Peak Summer Season

As expected, website activity increased significantly during the summer quarter as visitors planned trips, explored park destinations, researched passes and permits and searched for seasonal experiences. The site reached nearly half a million users and generated more than 1.2-million-page views during the three-month period.

- 491,408 total users, including 392,151 new users
- 1,222,945 page views
- 3.0 page views per visit
- 1 minute, 19 seconds average time spent, a 20-second increase over the previous quarter
- 39,971 files downloaded
- 61% of users accessed the site on mobile devices

## Park Destinations and Revenue-Related Content Drive Visits

Cape Henlopen State Park was the most-viewed page during the quarter with 146,613 views, representing nearly 12% of all page views, followed by Passes, Permits and Fees with 111,744 views. Killens Pond Waterpark ranked third with more than 98,000 views, demonstrating the strong seasonal impact of summer recreation. Delaware Seashore, Killens Pond, Trap Pond and Lums Pond also ranked among the most-visited content.

Organic search, primarily through search engines such as Google, continued to be the largest source of website traffic, accounting for 57% of users, followed by direct traffic at 34%. Search activity was heavily focused on camping and destination planning, with terms related to Delaware Seashore camping, Killens Pond camping and Indian River Inlet camping among the leading searches. The website received search visits from more than 12,000 different keyword searches during the period.

Mobile remained the dominant way visitors accessed the site, representing more than 61% of users, with iPhone traffic outpacing Android by approximately three to one. Delaware audiences were led by Newark, Wilmington, Dover and Lewes, while Philadelphia and New York were among the largest identifiable out-of-state markets.

One smaller but noteworthy trend: 2,910 users arrived through AI assistants, representing 0.7% of traffic and providing an emerging source of website referrals. The team is exploring how to maximize this new search channel, including making content easier to discover, refining copy to provide clearer answers to common queries and developing a resource page specifically designed to support AI search.

# Media

This quarter, Delaware State Parks was featured in about four dozen news and media articles and segments, highlighting the continued public interest in parks statewide. Notably, Trap Pond State Park was named one of the Best Places to Camp in the Northeast by Dyrt, a nationwide app for the best campsites, and the University of Delaware showcased ongoing collaborative research partnerships between the university and Delaware State Parks.

Other prominent stories include the Delaware State Parks Beach Patrol helping to earn its third national championship as part of the Sussex County Lifesaving Association team, the opening of the Hidden Falls Mixed Species Exhibit at the Brandywine Zoo, a groundbreaking for the Creekside Discovery Center at White Clay Creek State Park, construction of a 14-cabin complex at Lums Pond State Park, a new Trackchair for Alapocas Run State Park, a Paddle Quest challenge for the 75th Anniversary and proposed rules and regulation updates for the park system.

## Articles Written About Delaware State Parks

**Coastal Point, Kerin Magill** – Bonfire and History to Combine at Fenwick Island State Park. 9-25-26

**Only in Delaware, Beth Copenhaver –** See Delaware's First Old-Growth Forest at Brandywine Creek State Park. 9-12-26

**Delaware News Journal, Sophia Voight –** Judge Morris Estate in White Clay Creek State Park to Host Weddings. 9-4-26

**Newark Post, Josh Shannon –** White Clay Creek State Park Breaks Ground on Creekside Discovery Center. 8-24-26

**WDEL, Rachel Suga –** Canoeing Trips Coming Up on the Brandywine River. 8-21-26

**Big Tuna and The Squid; Episode 7, Puppies in the Pool –** Puppies in the Pool at Killens Pond Waterpark. 8-17-26

**Delaware News Journal, Shannon Marvel McNaught –** Sussex Lifeguards National Champions for Third Year in a Row**.** 8-9-26

**Coast TV, Emma Aken –** Delaware Seeks Public Input on Five-Year State Parks Plan. 8-9-26

**UDaily, Molly Schafer –** In Our Backyard. 8-8-26

**Islands, Neha Maheshwari –** An Hour from Rehoboth Beach Is Delaware's State Park with

Scenic Wetlands, Fishing, and Camping. 8-3-26

**Cape Gazette –** DNREC Launches Paddle Quest as New Summer Challenge**.** 8-1-26

**Delaware State Parks, Ben Mace –** Delaware State Parks Adding 14 Cabins above the Canal. 7-31-26

**Cape Gazette –** Friends of Cape State Park Secures $12K for Hydration Station. 7-28-26

**Delaware Public Media, Abigail Lee –** Brandywine Zoo Unveils New Multi-Species Exhibit, Bringing New Animals to Wilmington. 7-26-26

**The Dyrt –** 2026 Best Places to Camp in the Northeast Region. 7-23-26

**Cape Gazette, Grace Hoffman –** Delaware State Parks Beach Patrol Wins Lifeguard Olympics. 7-23-26

**WBOC, Outdoors Delmarva, Lauren Hitch –** Delaware State Parks: Introduction to Surf Fishing. 7-20- 26

**Coastal Point, Mike Stern –** Local Rotary Raises Money for Two-Person Lifeguard Stands at State Park**.** 7-17-26

**WDEL, Mark Fowser –** Track-Chair Arrives at Another Delaware State Park. 7-11-26

**WBOC, Outdoors Delmarva, Lauren Hitch –** Attending the Delaware DNREC Beach Driving Clinic at Delaware Seashore State Park. 7-6-26

**Delaware News Journal, Krys'tal Griffin and Molly McVety –** Water Parks in Delaware, Maryland and Pennsylvania to Enjoy This Year. 7-6-26

**CoastTV, Torie Seagraves –** DNREC to Hold Hearing on Proposed Delaware State Park Rule Changes. 7-3-26

**Outdoor Delaware, Matt Bittle –** Celebrating Delaware's Ties to the American Revolution Through Historic Places. July 2026

# Creative Services/Publications

Creative Services concentrated heavily on major zoo deliverables, including updated exhibit signage and the mixed species exhibit commemorative poster. These early quarter priorities required extensive coordination with parks' exhibit coordinator and zoo staff to ensure accuracy, clear interpretation and alignment with exhibit launch.

August and September shifted toward wayside signage updates, revisions and rebranding efforts across multiple park locations. This work included panels for Whiskey Beach, the Inlet Bridge, Barrier Island, Sugar Bowl, Cauffiel Estate and several Cape Henlopen installations. Additional seasonal needs such as map and brochure replenishment, summer programming support and preparations for the fall Hershey RV Show added to production volume during this period.

Across the division, Creative Services delivered a wide range of products supporting events, programs, retail, marketing efforts and park operations. Completed projects included advertisements, banners, brochures, flyers, posters and specialty signage. Highlights included the Fort Miles Missouri Gun promotional materials, Fantasy Trail assets, Pollinator trading cards and volunteer showcase publications.

In total, the team completed 102 deliverables this quarter. Output included 23 signs, 21 banners, 14 waysides, nine posters, six flyers, four brochures, five maps, three ads and 13 miscellaneous items.