

**PARKS AND RECREATION
ELEMENT**

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Overview of Parks and Recreation Opportunities

Sussex County residents and visitors have many choices on how to spend their outdoor leisure time. The County is famous for its renowned public beaches. Innumerable docks, marinas, boat launches and landings provide access to the Atlantic Ocean, the Inland Bays and the County's rivers and creeks. State parks, state forests, municipal parks, and multi-use greenways offer a diverse variety of public recreation opportunities. This chapter of the Sussex County Comprehensive Plan Update looks at these opportunities and outlines strategies for sustaining and expanding public recreation choices in Sussex County.

State Parks and Forests

DNREC's Division of Parks and Recreation manages three Administrative Units in Sussex County, which include five state parks, seven nature preserves, and other recreation lands for a total of 14,265 acres. The State parks include:

- Cape Henlopen
- Delaware Seashore
- Fenwick Island
- Holts Landing
- Trap Pond

DNREC's Division of Fish & Wildlife oversees State wildlife areas, ponds and other open spaces in Sussex County. The Delaware Department of Agriculture's Forest Service is responsible for Redden State Forest, which is primarily north of Georgetown. The Redden State Forest, at 9,500 acres, is the largest of Delaware's three state forests and the only one in Sussex County. Sussex County recently contributed \$1.5 million towards expanding the boundaries of this State holding by 327 acres.

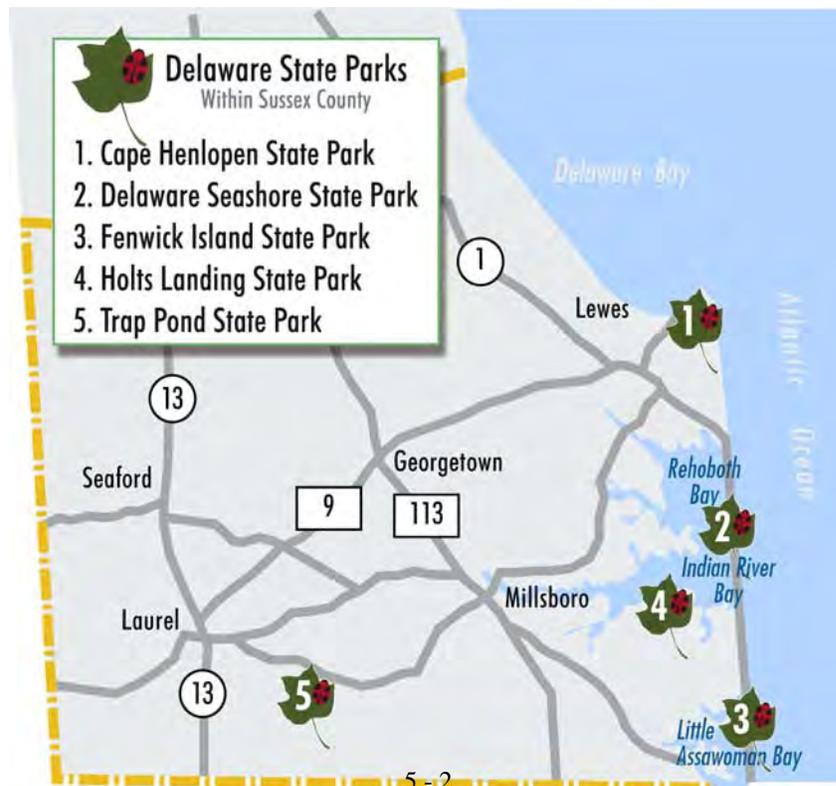
Fishing, camping, boating, hunting, swimming, and hiking are among the primary activities offered at the state parks in Sussex County.

- *Cape Henlopen State Park* is in Lewes, where the Atlantic Ocean meets the Delaware Bay. The park features public beaches, a nature trail, a World War II observation tower, family campgrounds, and an 18-hole disc golf course. There is also a quarter-mile fishing pier onto the Delaware Bay. Winter hunting is permitted in some areas.
- *Delaware Seashore State Park* is located between Dewey Beach and Bethany Beach. It has six miles of ocean and bay shoreline for fishing, swimming and sunbathing. The park features a 250-slip marina and a boat ramp. Seasonal hunting is permitted in some areas of the park.

- *Holts Landing State Park*, originally a family farm, is located on the southern shore of the Indian River Bay in Millville. Recreational facilities include tree-shaded picnic areas with grills, a playground, two ball fields, a boat-launching ramp for small motorized boats, sailboats, and windsurfing boards. The park also features the only pier on the Inland Bays built specifically for crabbing.
- *Fenwick Island State Park* is situated between Bethany Beach to the north and Fenwick Island to the south. Little Assawoman Bay forms the western edge of this park, providing many opportunities for salt-water recreation. The park has large areas of ocean and bay shoreline for swimming, surfing, and surf fishing. Seasonal hunting is allowed in some areas of the park. The park also has one the State’s few designated surfing areas.
- *Trap Pond State Park* is four miles east of Laurel off Route 24. The park offers hiking, fishing, swimming and camping activities. Picnicking, abundant wildlife, wild flowers and the country’s northernmost stand Bald Cypress trees are also found there.

Delaware’s state forests are managed for a variety of objectives, including, timber production, habitat enhancement, forestry demonstrations, and forestry research. State forests also provide recreation opportunities, such as hiking, horseback riding, and hunting, among other activities.

- *Redden State Forest* is in central Sussex County north of Georgetown. It offers over 44 miles of trails, some primitive camping sites, and a catch and release fishing pond. Redden also has a nature center and camping lodge. At 9,500 acres (distributed over 16 tracts), it is the largest of Delaware’s three state forests. Currently DNREC is examining opportunities to add to Redden’s land holdings. Sussex County contributed \$1.5 million towards adding 327 acres to this state forest in 2007.



Greenways and Trails

DNREC's Division of Parks and Recreation defines greenways as follows:

“A greenway is a natural area of unbroken vegetation where recreation and conservation are the primary values. They link parks, forests, wildlife refuges and historical landmarks. Greenways can follow rivers, streams, wetlands, barrier beaches, hilltops and abandoned rail lines, and cross fields and forests. Some greenways are publicly owned; others are private; some are for recreation; others protect a scenic view or wildlife habitat. Greenways can include biking and hiking trails, and paths of grass and trees threading their way through cities and countryside like ribbons of green”.

The Delaware Council on Greenways & Trails, is appointed by the General Assembly to preserve, protect and link the State's green open spaces. The Council encourages local communities, counties, and State agencies to work together toward greenway goals. The Council also works closely with other public and private groups to foster new greenways and trails.

Several existing and proposed greenways and trails are located entirely within, or pass through, Sussex County. Some are clearly defined recreation corridors already in use. At this point, others are planned routes or initial concepts that require further study, design and implementation.

- *American Discovery Trail* is a continuous hiking path proposed to extend across the United States from coast to coast. Cape Henlopen State Park is identified as the eastern trail head. The trail is proposed to travel 45 miles through Sussex County, primarily on road shoulders and sidewalks.
- *East Coast Greenway* is proposed as a city-to-city multi-use trail system through the densely populated eastern seaboard. Planners anticipate that this will be an urban alternative to the Appalachian Trail, 80% of which will be off-road. Several routes are being analyzed for bringing this trail through Delaware, including Sussex County.
- *Coastal Heritage Greenway* celebrates the diverse history of Delaware's waterfront from colonial settlement to 20th century industrialization. The greenway is a corridor that spans the coast for 90 miles from Fox Point State Park north of Wilmington to the state line at Fenwick Island. It is designed as a 27-stop auto tour with various side trips for hiking, biking, sight-seeing, and other activities. From Dover to Dewey Beach, the greenway lies east of Route 1. From Dewey Beach to Fenwick Island, Route 1 is the center of the greenway. Recommended Sussex County stops include Mispillion Lighthouse, Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuge, Beach Plum Island Nature Preserve, Lewes, and other points south.
- *The Junction and Breakwater Trail* takes its name from the former Penn Central Rail Line that ran between Lewes and Rehoboth in the mid 1800's. It is a 6-mile crushed stone rail/trail that connects in the southwestern side of Cape Henlopen State Park at Wolfe Neck with Rehoboth Beach. The northern trailhead, located at the historic Wolfe House, includes

a 56-car parking lot, an information center and a bike rack. The Junction & Breakwater Trail is the longest of Delaware’s three rail/trails. The trail includes a reconstructed 80-foot railroad bridge across Holland Glade. Planning is now underway to extend the trail further into Lewes.

- *Georgetown-Lewes Rail/Trail* was the subject of a feasibility study DelDOT recently completed. The trail would be built alongside a 16.7-mile stretch of the Delaware Coast Line Railroad between South Railroad Avenue in Georgetown and Cape Henlopen State Park. The trail would be constructed within a 60-foot wide, State-owned right of way paralleling the tracks. According to DelDOT, the rail line is only used between one and two times per week. The trail would be separated from the tracks by distances ranging from 10 feet to 25 feet. DelDOT has identified the future Lewes & Rehoboth Canal crossing as the biggest design challenge for this trail, with the Freeman Highway Bridge as a possible solution.
- *Ellendale-Lewes Rail Trail* is identified for further analysis in both the Greater Ellendale Area Comprehensive Plan and DelDOT’s Statewide Rails-to-Trails/ Rail-with-Trail System Master Plan. This trail would connect Ellendale with Milton along the State-owned Ellendale -Milton Industrial Track. The trail would then extend to Lewes along the Queen Anne’s Railway corridor.



In addition to trails that link two or more towns, several Sussex County municipalities are operating, constructing or planning their own greenways. Notable examples include the following:

- Mispillion Riverwalk in the City of Milford
- Governors Walk along the Broadkill River in the Town of Milton
- Riverwalk along Broad Creek in the Town of Laurel
- Town of Lewes greenway network

County and Municipal Involvement

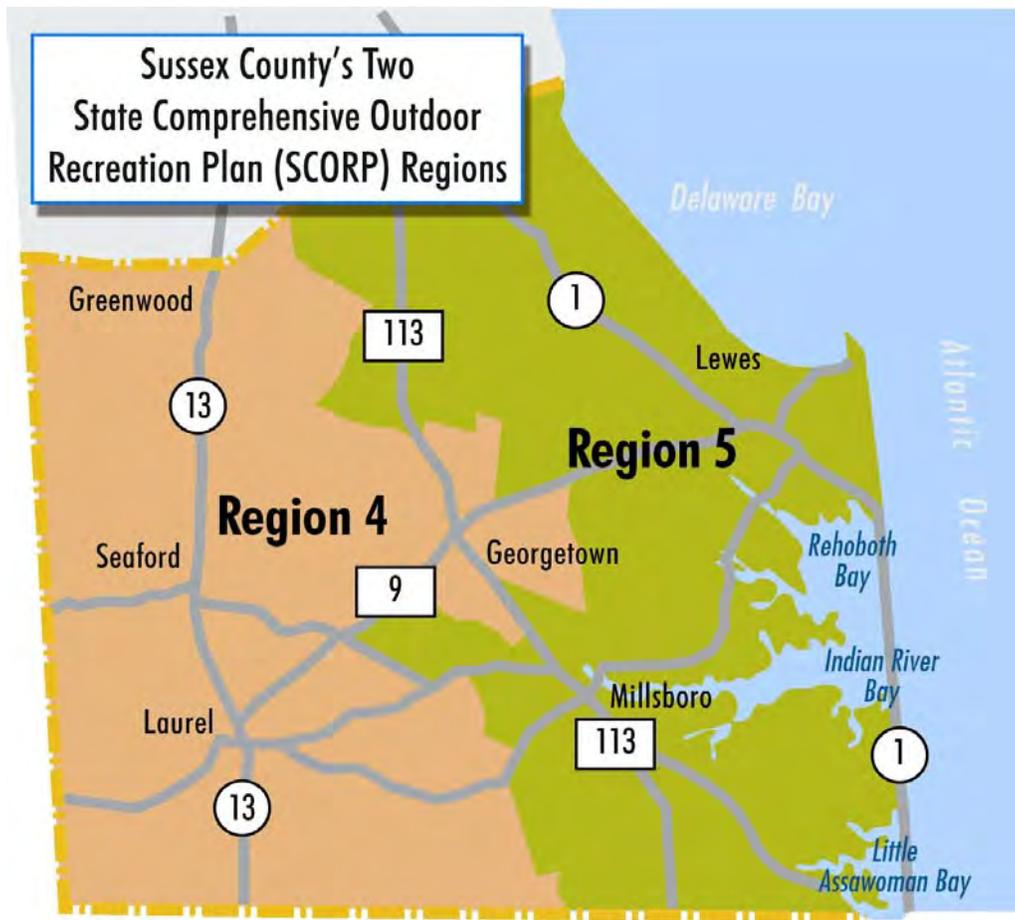
As noted in the previous chapter of this plan, Sussex County Council is very active in helping to finance open space preservation, using both dollars collected from developers and general revenue funds. Typically, the tracts preserved are administered by a conservation group if they were bought outright. They remain in private hands if they were preserved by easement. In addition to funding open space preservation, Sussex County makes donations to various recreation-related community groups. However, Sussex County does not provide recreation programming. Nor does the County own or operate its own parks or trails. In Sussex County, the incorporated municipalities and private non-profit entities have been the prime parties responsible for the construction and maintenance of local public parks and trails. The municipalities and assorted private groups, such as youth athletic organizations and others, provide most recreation programming.

Delaware State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)

DNREC's Division of Parks and Recreation updates the Delaware State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) every five years. By law, this plan maintains Delaware's eligibility to receive grants through the Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund. It also assists in setting spending priorities for a similar State recreation funding source called the Delaware Conservation Trust Fund.

The SCORP includes extensive inventory data and utilizes a public survey to help measure outdoor recreation preferences. The plan has a state-wide focus. Consequently, recreation resources, needs and goals are identified on a regional basis rather than at the municipal level.

Sussex County includes two of the SCORP's five planning areas: Region 4 in western Sussex and Region 5 in eastern Sussex. According to the 2003 SCORP, Region 4 had 7,239 acres of public recreation land and 45.4 miles of hiking trails. Region 5 had 33,143 acres of public park land and 29.3 miles of hiking trails.



Among other findings, the 2003 SCORP reported the following public survey and research results for Sussex County:

- 51% of Region 4 respondents and 70% of Region 5 respondents reported that outdoor recreation is “very important” to them.
- Top four recreation activities engaged in by respondents’ households:
 - Region 4 respondents: Walking/jogging (79%), Picnicking (77%), Swimming (67%), and Visiting historic sites (66%).
 - Region 5 respondents: Walking/jogging (89%), Swimming (83%), Picnicking (79%), and Visiting historic sites (75%).
- Top four most visited areas:
 - Region 4 respondents: Trap Pond State Park, Killens Pond State Park, Cape Henlopen State Park, and Rehoboth Public Beach.

- Region 5 respondents: Cape Henlopen State Park, Rehoboth Public Beach, Killens Pond State Park, and Trap Pond State Park.
- High Priority Recreation Needs:
 - Region 4: Walking/jogging paths, Picnic Areas, Bike Paths, Fishing Areas.
 - Region 5: Walking/jogging paths, Bike Paths, Fishing Areas.

Parks and Recreation Strategies

The following strategies address: a) Sussex County’s specific role in providing more parks and trails; and b) policies the County should pursue in support of creating more parks and recreation opportunities for Sussex County residents.

- Regarding Sussex County’s specific future involvement in parks and recreation, the County should:
 - Continue to facilitate the preservation of more undeveloped land. This should include recognition of the Sussex County Land Trust’s long-range vision to gradually create a “green ribbon” of connected open spaces throughout the County. This “green ribbon” concept should be referenced in formulating the County’s open space preservation priorities and strategies.
 - Keep providing selected grant assistance to selected non-profit recreation providers that help meet high priority public recreation needs.
 - Periodically re-evaluate the possibility of becoming an active financial partner in establishing a public park, building an indoor recreation complex, or constructing a related recreation endeavor, such as a greenway trail. Council should evaluate these opportunities on a case-by case basis as they may arise in the future.
 - Adopt zoning and/or subdivision code amendments that would require developers of larger residential projects to provide recreation facilities or multi-use trails to serve their future residents. The County should pursue these amendments in conjunction with its efforts to strengthen ordinance definitions regarding the types of land that should be considered acceptable as dedicated public open space in new developments.
 - Continue working with DNREC and other state agencies to ensure the State continues to add to the supply of active and passive recreation land and facilities in Sussex County.

- Require that recreation lands in new developments that are open to the public be protected by covenants.
- Delaware’s 2003 State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) contains many recommendation on what elected officials and other public policy makers can do to: a) direct more investment toward public recreation; and b) promote healthier and more active lifestyles. The Sussex County Council endorses these state recommendations, the essence of which are highlighted below in summary form:

Health

- Encourage more physical activity by promoting fitness challenges and similar recreation events.
- Encourage employers to offer more opportunities for moderate physical activity during the workday.
- Support developments that promote walking and biking as an alternative to transportation by car.

Linear Facilities

- Encourage municipalities to incorporate trails into their comprehensive plans and trail requirements into their development ordinances.
- Look for ways to retrofit greenway and trail corridors into existing neighborhoods.

Access

- Work with DelDOT to improve road sharing opportunities and make intersections safer for walkers and bikers.
- Ensure all recreation projects consider the special needs of physically challenged persons.

Park Maintenance and Operations

- Support public-private use sharing partnerships to make the most efficient use of existing recreation facilities, such as school facilities and YMCAs.
- Support appropriate park rehab and renovation projects not just the construction of new recreation sites.