



National Park Service
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Fire Island National Seashore News Release

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Summer Programs Still in Full Swing at Fire Island National Seashore Enchanted Evenings Programs at Watch Hill, Sailors Haven; Entries Accepted for Annual Photo Contest

Patchogue, New York—Fire Island National Seashore opened its public marinas and its campground at Watch Hill early for the kick-off of the 2008 season. Good weather for the Memorial Day and Fourth of July weekends helped get the summer off to a great start, and visitation at park facilities has continued to rise through July, despite some stormy weather. Year-to-date visitation through June 2008 is up almost 65%. Still, you can enjoy a broad range of experiences at Fire Island National Seashore, from quiet solitude to convivial camaraderie. You can enjoy the park on your own, or you can share the experience with others.

While Labor Day is just around the corner, there's still time to get out to the park's relatively uncrowded beaches and perhaps join one of Fire Island National Seashore's many ranger-guided tours or programs. Fire Island National Seashore's annual photograph contest is held in August at Sailors Haven. Entries are accepted August 10 – 16 at Sailors Haven Visitor Center or at Park Headquarters. (*Learn More!*)

August is also the month that the annual fundraiser is conducted by the Fire Island Lighthouse Preservation Society: the Barefoot Black Tie Dinner and Dance will be held on August 9 this year, with tickets on sale through August 1.

Getting There

Ferry service to Watch Hill and Sailors Haven will remain on the summer schedule through September 1. Fares this summer have been kept at 2007 rates, so this is a relative bargain. The Long Island Railroad also has expanded its special rail/taxi/ferry day-trip packages this year. The LIRR 2008 Long Island Beach Packages now include Kismet/Fire Island Lighthouse and several Fire Island communities, as well as the packages to Sailors Haven/Sunken Forest and Watch Hill. "Getting to one of the best seashores in the country couldn't be easier! We've expanded service to the public this year," stated Acting Superintendent Sean McGuinness, "with additional lifeguard services and interpretive programs. Hours and days of operation for the restaurant at Watch Hill have been increased. It's been an awesome summer so far. If a 'staycation' is on your agenda for this summer, then we encourage you to get out and safely enjoy one of the national parks in your own back yard on Long Island."

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Beach Safety

With heavy rains during July, there were reports of water quality issues and beach closures on some Long Island beaches. (Suffolk County's closures and warnings are posted for all beaches that are monitored by the New York State beach water quality program for Suffolk County at <http://www.co.suffolk.ny.us/Home/departments/healthservices/environmentalquality/ecology/marinereources/advisories.aspx>.) The ocean beaches are not as vulnerable to run-off contamination as are those on mainland Long Island. Fire Island beaches will often be safe from contamination when beaches on the South Shore of Long Island are officially closed.

However, high surf and dangerous rip currents can be experienced on ocean beaches when storms are far at sea. That was the case this July on Long Island's Atlantic coast. You should always swim with a buddy and preferably at a lifeguarded beach. "Our lifeguards have conducted more than a dozen surf rescues this summer," stated Chief Ranger Jay Lippert. "We encourage all beach users to swim at guarded beaches, and use common sense and a healthy respect for the ocean." All beaches at Fire Island National Seashore are "Swim at Your Own Risk" when guards are not on duty or on unprotected beaches. This year, National Park Service lifeguards are stationed on Fire Island at Watch Hill and Sailors Haven (weekdays 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. and weekends 9 a.m. – 6 p.m. through September 1) and at Barrett Beach (10 a.m. – 4 p.m. on Friday, Saturday and Sunday in July and August).

Always respect the surf and sun, and follow other safety precautions when you visit the park.

Can I Bring My Dog?

Pets are not permitted on most beaches within Fire Island National Seashore or in the federal wilderness area from March 15 through Labor Day, due to the increase in piping plover nesting activity. Your understanding of restrictions and support for the threatened and endangered species program are greatly appreciated. However, properly leashed and well-behaved pets are allowed in the marinas and at the Watch Hill campground.

Places to Go

There's more to Fire Island National Seashore than just the beach.

The **William Floyd Estate** is a detached unit of Fire Island National Seashore, located in Mastic Beach. This historic site interprets the history of one of Long Island's earliest American patriot families and their descendants. The William Floyd Estate grounds are open from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. (gate closes at 4 p.m.) and the "Old Mastic House" is open for tours from 10 a.m. – 4 p.m., Friday – Sunday and holidays, May 24 through October 31, 2008. Free 1-hour guided tours are offered every half-hour. A host of intriguing in-depth programs help you learn even more. Reservations are required for the special programs, and space is limited. Call 631-399-2030 *on Friday or Saturday, 11 a.m. - 1 p.m.* for more information or to make your reservations. You can find out more at the park's web page: www.nps.gov/fiis/planyourvisit/williamfloydestate.htm.

At the southernmost end of William Floyd Parkway, you'll find Fire Island National Seashore's **Wilderness Visitor Center**. This is one of two points on Fire Island that you can reach by car. You'll need to park at Smith Point County Park (*fee charged*) and walk to the visitor center. Through September 1, the facility will be open Wednesday and Thursday, 9 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. and Friday through Sunday, 9 a.m. – 6 p.m. After September 3, hours are 9 a.m. – 4 p.m., Wednesday through Sunday. In July and August, the *Junior Ranger: Path to Discovery* program is offered at 2 p.m. on Fridays. A mid-morning stroll will be conducted every Saturday at 10 a.m., and *Children's Hour: Seaside Stories and Crafts* will be held on Saturdays at 2 p.m. A variety of Nature Crafts is offered every Sunday at 10:30 a.m.

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The Wilderness Visitor Center is one of two gateways into the **Otis Pike Fire Island High Dune Wilderness**. This 1,363-acre parcel is the only federally designated wilderness in the state of New York, and one of the smallest wilderness areas in the country. Its value is immense, however, since it is so close to so many people who may otherwise never have the opportunity to experience the values of untrammelled land preserved as wilderness. A universally accessible boardwalk helps you explore about a half-mile of the dune and swale communities behind the primary dune line. You may then venture beyond the facilities into the primitive Fire Island Wilderness or out to a quiet stretch of shoreline for serendipitous beachcombing.

Watch Hill is the other entry point into the federally designated wilderness area. A limited number of overnight backcountry camping permits are issued from both the Watch Hill and Wilderness visitor centers. However, you may want to wait for cooler weather for your wilderness camping adventure.

On the western terminus of the Fire Island Wilderness lies **Watch Hill**. This is Fire Island National Seashore's largest area developed for recreation. The Watch Hill Marina has 183 boat slips and the campground includes 26 walk-in sites, both under the management of Fire Island Concessions, LLC. The *Pier at Watch Hill* restaurant reopened last year, and has extended its hours of operation in 2008. Through September 1, the restaurant will be open Thursday through Saturday from 5 – midnight, and Sunday from 3 – 7 p.m. In September, restaurant service will be reduced to Friday and Saturday only. Watch Hill's boardwalk through the nature trail was rerouted and resurfaced in 2006 and 2007. The sheltered coves and extensive salt marsh at Watch Hill beckon your exploration of the more primitive side of Fire Island. National Park Service-conducted guided canoe programs will help get you there. Free canoe programs are offered at 11 a.m. on Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday, from July 1 through Labor Day. The *Junior Ranger: Path to Discovery* program will be conducted at Watch Hill on Friday afternoons at 2 p.m. *Children's Seaside Stories and Crafts* will be presented on Saturday afternoons at 2 p.m. Plan to get your feet wet when you join us for *Catch of the Day: Seining in the Great South Bay*, offered every other Sunday at 2 p.m. The Enchanted Evenings program is offered every Saturday at 8: p.m., with a different program every week. The Watch Hill Visitor Center is open daily, 9 a.m. – 5 p.m., with longer hours of operation on weekends.

You can get to Watch Hill directly from Patchogue via the Watch Hill Ferry, or enjoy the 1-mile stroll and longer ferry service hours by taking the Davis Park Ferry from Sandspit Marina in Patchogue.

Barrett Beach/Talisman continues to be a favorite out-of-the way beach, where smaller boats regularly anchor offshore. There is a dock at the former Barrett Beach Marina site for the drop-off of passengers on private vessels and water taxis. In 2008, ferry service from Patchogue is available on four weekends. Weather permitting, round-trip ferry service from the Watch Hill Ferry Terminal in Patchogue—leaving at 9:30 a.m. and returning to Patchogue at 4:15 p.m.—is being offered on July 12-13 and 26-27, and August 9-10 and 23-24. Groups may arrange for charter service to Barrett Beach from Patchogue (call Davis Park Ferry Company at 631-475-1665) or from Sayville (call Sayville Ferry Service at 631-589-8980). Facilities at this site include bayside restrooms and picnic tables, and a quiet stretch of ocean and bay beach. Lifeguards are on the ocean beach from 10 a.m. – 4 p.m. on Friday, Saturday and Sunday during July and August. Limited snack bar service is available this year on the weekends when ferry service is scheduled.

No trip to Fire Island should be without a tour of the **Sunken Forest at Sailors Haven**. You can get there by ferry from Sayville, by private boat or water taxi, or by walking down the beach from the western Fire Island communities. The Sailors Haven Visitor Center is open daily through Labor Day, 10 a.m. – 5 p.m., with longer hours of operation on weekends, then on weekends through the fall. The Sunken Forest boardwalk is expected to be resurfaced this fall with recycled plastic lumber.

The Sunken Forest Tours are now offered daily at 11 a.m., with additional afternoon tours on Saturday and Sunday at 2:30 p.m. From July 1 through September 3, additional tours and other ranger-conducted activities are offered. The *Junior Ranger: Path to Discovery* program is conducted at Sailors Haven on Friday afternoons at 2 p.m. *Children's Seaside Stories and Crafts* is presented on Saturday afternoons at 2 p.m. Plan to get your feet wet when you join us for *Catch of the Day: Seining in the Great South Bay*, offered every Sunday at 2 p.m. *Enchanted Evenings* is offered on Saturdays at 8 p.m. with a different program each week.

You can get to Sailors Haven directly from Sayville via the Sailors Haven/Sunken Forest Ferry, or enjoy the 1-mile stroll and longer ferry service hours by taking the Cherry Grove Ferry from Sayville.

While ferries can transport you from Patchogue, Sayville or Bay Shore to Fire Island, you may also get from site to site via water taxi. Fire Island Water Taxi is authorized to provide access from the communities to the Fire Island Lighthouse, one of the tallest in the country.

The **Fire Island Lighthouse** and museum is open year-round, with extended hours in the summer (9:30 a.m. – 5 p.m.). Tower tours are offered throughout the day, and special programs are scheduled periodically. On August 16 & 17, the Amateur Radio Lighthouse Weekend will be in action, with the Great South Bay Amateur Radio Club set up to communicate with other radio operators from around the world. A Beach Apparatus Drill is scheduled for Thursday, August 21 at 7 p.m. You may reach the lighthouse by walking the 0.7-mile boardwalk from Robert Moses State Park, Field 5 (*fee charged for parking*).

Special Programs and Projects

The Fire Island Trek will be offered twice this September. The 3-day hike on September 3-5, 2008 includes special tours and hiking from the Otis Pike Fire Island High Dune Wilderness area to the Fire Island Lighthouse. New this year is an abbreviated Golden Age Trek on September 11-12, 2008. You must provide your own transportation and pay for meals, and a fee is charged for some overnight accommodations. Spaces are limited. You may get details on the park's website at www.nps.gov/fiis/fire-island-trek.htm or call 631-687-4765.

Fire Island National Seashore continues the process of developing a new **General Management Plan (GMP)** for the park. Scoping began in 2006, foundation workshops were conducted in 2007. An Interim Report was published and several GMP workshops were conducted in the first half of 2008. Now the team is quietly working behind the scenes to draft development alternatives. These should be available for public review and input by late 2008. You can stay abreast of the planning steps by visiting the park's web site, or by signing up for an e-newsletter. For more information about Fire Island National Seashore, visit the park's website at www.nps.gov/fiis.

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