

VII. Public Access Plan



VII. Public Access Plan

A. Goals and Objectives

The DNERR has these primary goals for public access to the Reserve:

- Maintain each Reserve component's integrity for research, long-term resource protection, and education while permitting traditional uses that do not conflict with Reserve goals.
- Minimize adverse impacts to the Reserve resulting from illegal and/or improper conduct of visitors.
- Enhance public access to the St. Jones Reserve component.
- Continue to expand the visibility of the DNERR and its recreational and educational offerings.

Specific objectives to aid in achieving these goals include:

- Assisting in the coordination of hunting regulation efforts with the DNREC's Division of Fish and Wildlife (DFW).
- Exploring the feasibility of using volunteers to open the St. Jones Center on weekends.
- Heightening the visibility of the Reserve through participation in local public events and advertisement in the local media.
- Developing partnerships with local agencies and organizations, and cosponsoring and/or participating in public events in order to promote public awareness of the Reserve and its opportunities for visitation.
- Conduct a public access assesment of the Blackbird component

B. General Access Policy

Public access to the Reserve is permitted on a site-specific basis. The objective of controlled access is to maintain each Reserve component's integrity for research, long-term resource protection, and education while permitting traditional uses that do not conflict with Reserve goals.

Entering or remaining on lands that are under the jurisdiction of the DNERR when such lands are closed, or entering or remaining within any building, structure, or facility when such building, structure, or facility is closed, shall be prohibited without a written permit from the Reserve Manager.

No structure, facility, building, or area administered by the DNERR will be used for any activity other than that for which it was intended without prior written permission of the Reserve Manager.

The Reserve Manager may limit or close specific public-use areas, lands, waters, and facilities, and/or temporarily prohibit certain activities when such action is deemed necessary for resource management, research, education, and/or when it is in the best interest of health, safety, and the general welfare of the public.

C. Site-Specific Access Policies

1. Lower St. Jones River Reserve Component

The general public is permitted to access outdoor facilities at the St. Jones River Reserve component, such as the boardwalk, trail, and outdoor exhibits, from 8:00 a.m. to dusk on a year-round basis, except as restricted for special uses. General public visitation of the St. Jones Center is permitted from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. All access is for identified facilities only; free roaming through the site is not permitted without written approval of the Reserve Manager.

All groups are advised to contact the DNERR Education Coordinator or the Reserve Manager to arrange for special programs, guided tours, meeting space, or other uses of the Visitors Center or Reserve property.

2. Upper Blackbird Creek Reserve Component

Due to the ecologically sensitive environment of the Upper Blackbird Creek site access by the general public is not encouraged at this time. However, as properties are added to the Blackbird Component opportunities for public access will be reassessed. After the completion of a public access plan, passive recreation will be encouraged in designated areas. Access to this Reserve component can be considered for individuals or groups by special appointment made in advance with the Reserve Manager. For information regarding educational field trip opportunities, contact the Reserve Education Coordinator.

D. Boat and Canoe Access

Access for canoe and kayak launch or retrieval is permitted only in designated locations and during times permitted for general public visitation. The St. Jones Reserve component is easily accessed by boat from Scotton Landing, approximately 1.5 miles upstream of the core boundary. Lebanon Landing and Legislative Landing, both further upstream, provide canoe and/or kayak access to the St. Jones River. The Blackbird Creek Reserve component can be accessed by a boat launch at “The Rocks,” a DFW property several miles downstream of the core boundary. Reserve property adjacent to Blackbird Landing Bridge offers access but no developed launch area. Launch or retrieval of other boats by the public on either Reserve site is not permitted without written permission of the Reserve Manager. Canoe and kayak access may be a compatible low impact public use at the Blackbird component. This will be considered in the coming years as part of a public access assessment.

E. Fishing, Hunting, and Trapping

Traditional activities of fishing, hunting, and trapping will be permitted up to levels currently permitted under local and State laws (unless these uses interfere with a research or educational activity that cannot avoid a conflict with these traditional uses). The Reserve adjoins the Ted Harvey Conservation Area, a large State hunting area managed by the DFW. At the appropriate times of year, this Division is also responsible for ensuring that appropriate hunting regulations are followed by hunters on DNERR property.

Hunting at the St. Jones site is limited to a small land area due to the numerous public programs conducted at the Center. There is only one deer stand on the property. The DFW also monitors two duck hunting blinds within the DNERR marsh. No other game hunting is allowed on Reserve property. The DNERR and DFW coordinate locations and hunting seasons each year. The Protected

Area Geographic Information System (PAGIS) has been invaluable in producing maps and locating all hunting areas within and surrounding both Reserve components, and will continue to be used in support of this management issue.

There is currently no hunting on the Blackbird component due to deed restrictions. Hunting access will be reviewed for conservation purposes on any newly acquired lands. All hunting activities at the Black component will be coordinated through the DFW.

F. Other Uses

Reserve access for uses other than those listed will be permitted on a case-by-case basis. The Reserve Manager's written authorization must be received prior to initiating any other uses.

G. Action Plan for Public Access

To date, there have been no significant public access issues with either component of the Reserve. As the Reserve becomes more widely known, however, visitor numbers are steadily increasing. Planning is therefore needed to cater to this larger audience, not only to ensure an educational visit, but also to protect the Reserve's environmental integrity. The DNERR will do the following:

- **Action 1: Monitor traditional use activities at the Reserve.**
The DNERR will continue to use PAGIS to assist with the coordination of hunting and fishing access and regulations on Reserve property. The Reserve staff will continue to map hunting locations and public access entry and access points, and will provide all relevant information to the DFW.
- **Action 2: Utilize volunteers to increase public access to the Reserve.**
The DNERR will develop a strategy to make the St. Jones Reserve component more accessible to the general public on weekends through the use of volunteers at the Visitors Center. This task is dependent upon an increase in volunteers as well as on funding for a Volunteer Coordinator (see Chapter V, the Administration Plan).
- **Action 3: Promote public access to the Reserve through advertisement and collaboration.**
The DNERR will continue to advertise public access to the Reserve's sites and programs through maintenance and creation of signage to be placed on or near component boundaries, and through advertisements in local media such as TV, radio, newspapers, and bulletin boards. In addition, the DNERR will strengthen and expand relationships with the following organizations: the Kent County Parks and Recreation Section, the City of Dover Parks and Recreation Department, the Delaware Native Plant Society, The Nature Conservancy, the DNS, and the Partnership for the Delaware Estuary. When possible, the Reserve will combine public programs with any of these organizations to maximize audience size and exposure.
- **Action 4: Address public access issues in relation to the purchase of any property identified as a potential acquisition site (see Chapter X, the Stewardship Plan).**

- **Action 5: Conduct a Blackbird Creek Component public access/use assessment.**

The area surrounding the Blackbird Creek Component is under heavy development pressure. The DNERR anticipates an increasing interest in access to its sites by local residents. A public access/use assessment will be conducted to outline acceptable uses and provide a clear access policy.

