



2022 Surf Fishing Report

Feb. 15, 2023

2022: A Year In Review

DNREC Makes Changes with Help of Stakeholder Group, Reservation System Replaces Cap

Despite "server busy" errors and timed out orders, it's remarkable how quickly the Delaware State Parks annual surf fishing permits sold out last year in less than four hours. At one point, volume increased to 742 permits sold per minute, leaving many left without a permit. Understanding the frustration that some customers experienced due to the overwhelm of the point-of-sale system, the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control knew a more balanced way to issue drive on surf fishing permits for Delaware State Parks was needed. Taking action, the division immediately started working on solutions and options that could bring equity to anglers who enjoy a day of fishing on the coastline.

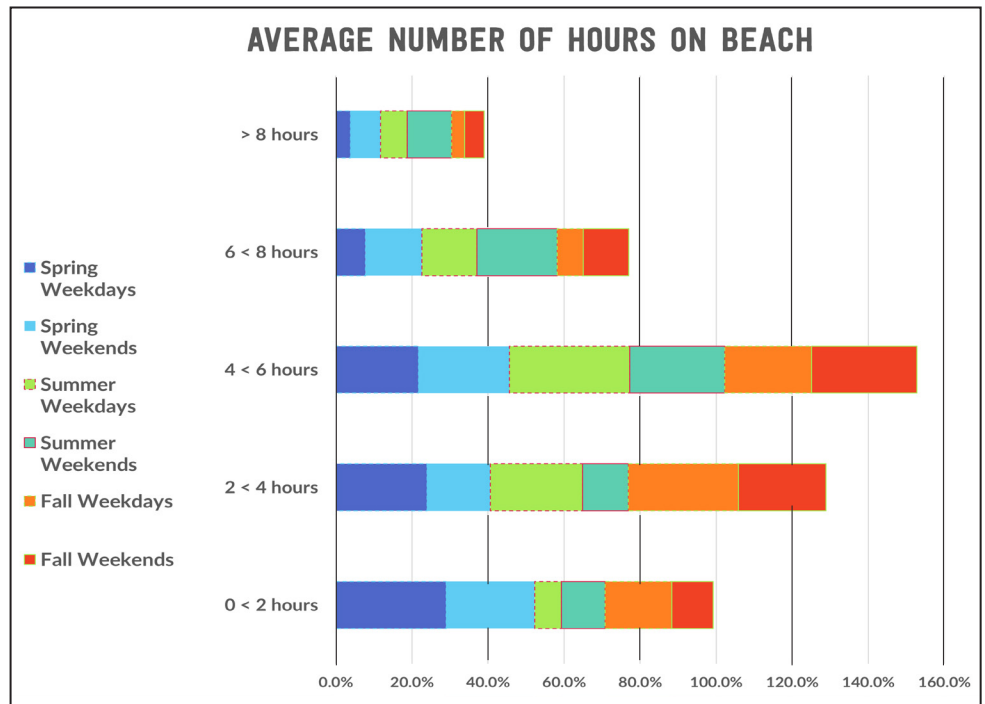


Research Began

DNREC's Division of Parks and Recreation invited community members from various backgrounds to participate in a stakeholder group to research and comment on changes that would improve the system. The group included legislators from the Delaware General Assembly, the Delaware Volunteer Firefighters Association, park neighbors, a bait and tackle shop owner, the Department of Transportation, the Delaware Parks and Recreation Council, Delaware Mobile Surf Fishermen and experts in environmental science from Delaware universities.

The division sent surveys to more than 30,000 current and previous surf fishing permit holders. The No. 1 survey result was that the public no longer wanted a cap on surf fishing permits. Of the more than 7,000 responses, 74.6% were from Delaware residents and 23.6% were non-residents and 2% did not specify their state of residence.

In addition to the surveys, the division took additional steps to gather surf fishing usage information. A traffic counter was installed at Cape Henlopen State Park by partnering with the Delaware Department of Transportation and the Delaware State Police provided a flyover to shoot video and photography of Cape Henlopen, Delaware Seashore and Fenwick Island state parks on a busy surf fishing day in July.



A workgroup of 20 division staff volunteered to provide strategy research and support as the stakeholder group looked at best practices across the nation with a goal of providing access to surf fishing on state park multi-use beaches while protecting the natural resource.



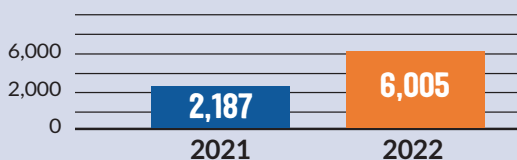
Changes Announced

The final recommendation was to replace the cap on surf fishing permits with a pilot reservation-based system for managing how many vehicles are on the beaches during peak weekends, when the state's surf fishing beaches are in highest demand. As part of the recommendations of the stakeholder group, all surf fishing permit holders will be required to watch an instructional surf fishing video prior to driving on the beach that has beach driving tips, including requisite understanding of airing down tires, in-vehicle mandatory equipment, and safety requirements for surf fishing on state park beaches, prior to driving onto the beach.

The division communicated these pilot changes in November 2022 to the public via several channels, including a news release, press briefing, website notice, flyer, on social media and through outreach with the Delaware Mobile Surf Fishermen club, the saltwater flyfishing anglers, local homeowners' groups, the Delaware Volunteer Firefighters Association, Center for the Inland Bays and Lewes Chamber of Commerce. Division staff was trained on the changes in order to increase customer service and response times. Prior to sales going live Nov. 29, 2022, the division utilized social media, an e-newsletter and its destateparks.com website for updates to ensure those who wanted a permit knew exactly when they went on sale. Social media, print ads, radio spots and the Delaware State Parks newsletter continue to remind the public that surf permits are for sale now and they will not sell out.

For additional information about the 2023 pilot changes to the surf fishing program, go to destateparks.com/SurfTagSales. To purchase a Delaware surf fishing permit, go to any park office or <https://destateparks.com/PassesTagsFees>.

OFF-PEAK SURF PERMITS ISSUED



Off-Peak Permits Are Back

Also available again for 2023 is the off-peak surf fishing permit that offers year-round drive-on access while excluding peak weekends and holidays from May 20 through the Labor Day weekend.

More About the Reservation System

The new reservation system is being developed and tested by the division's point-of-sale vendor, Aspira, and will help manage the number of vehicles on each Delaware State Park multi-use drive-on beach during peak time periods, specifically on Saturdays, Sundays and holidays starting the third weekend in May through Labor Day weekend, from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. – a total of 36 days, for annual and two-year surf fishing permit holders. A fee of \$4 per reservation will be charged during peak times and the reservation can only be made for a vehicle with a Delaware surf fishing permit.

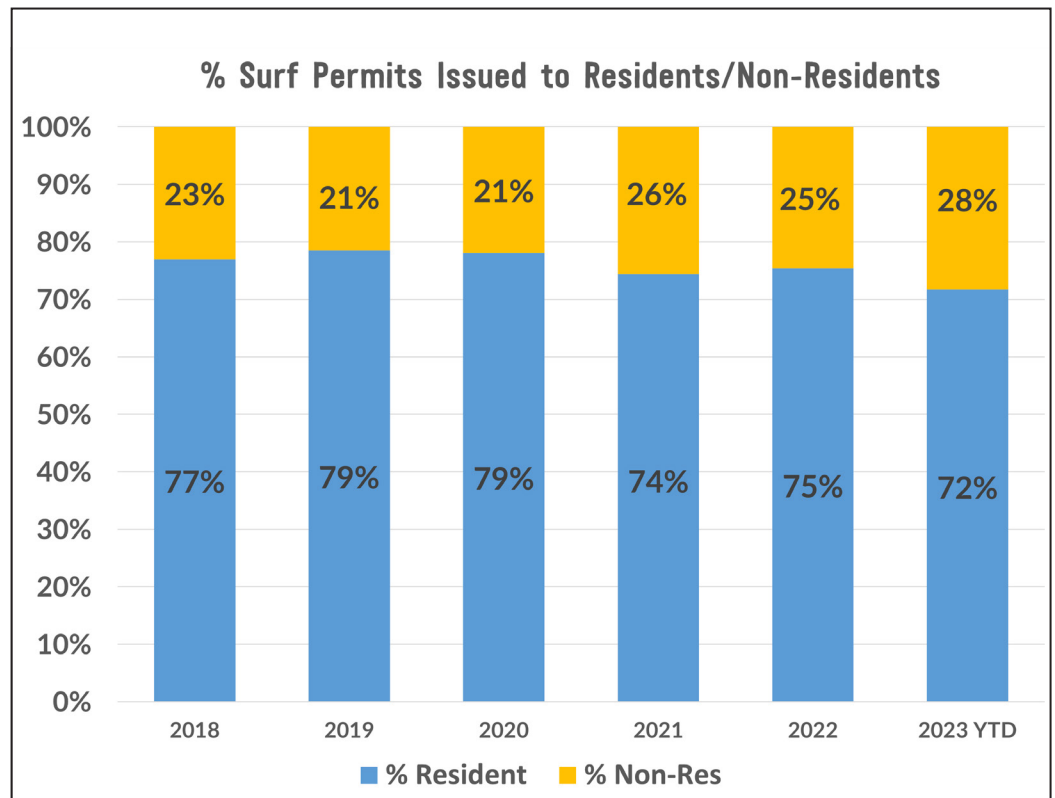
- Reservations will not be available for off-peak surf permit holders.
- Reservations will be for a specific beach location and can be made for one of seven separate locations.
- Reservations can be made conveniently online (desktop and mobile) or through the Division of Parks and Recreation's call center. Reservations cannot be made in-person at the state parks or at the DNREC central office in Dover.
- Reservations must be printed and displayed in the vehicle for enforcement verification. Mobile verification may be used as a backup.
- Weekend reservations will be made available weekly. Reservations will be first-come, first-served and will open midweek for the coming weekend, including holidays.
- Reservations will continue to be taken through 4 p.m. if space allows on the day-of to accommodate same-day reservations. Specific details will be available before the new system goes live.
- One reservation will be allowed per surf tag permit holder per day and are non-refundable and non-transferable.
- Even when a park reaches capacity, anglers with reservations will be allowed into the park for surf fishing
- Annual surf fishing permit holders can access the beach without a reservation on weekends and holidays after 4 p.m. but must be off the beach by 8 a.m. the next morning.
- Anglers who previously purchased a two-year permit (2022-23) will be subject to the new reservation system.
- The division refunded the second year of 2022-2023 two-year permits upon request due to the new reservation fee.

2023 Sales So Far

With the cap no longer in place, 2023 sales started on Nov. 29th and have returned to a more normal sales pattern. From Nov. 29th to Feb. 8th, 3,740 annual surf fishing permits and 301 off-peak permits had been sold for the 2023/2024 years.

Permit rates will remain the same, with Resident, Senior Resident, Senior Non-Resident, Non-Resident and Delaware firefighter/EMT as options.

The number of surf fishing permits sold to residents vs. non-residents continues to represent about a quarter of all permit sales; while 2023 sales to non-residents are slightly higher than previous years, that number is expected to return to around 25% once purchasing increases prior to summer.



Natural Resource Police Increase Efforts, Issue Record Number of Citations/Warnings

Delaware Natural Resource Police issued *nearly 650 citations and warnings on Delaware State Parks surf fishing beaches in 2022, a 20% increase in citations given in the 2021 season. The division has increased enforcement presence to enforce surf fishing rules and regulations. Enforcement will continue to use surf crossing checks and targeted enforcement of regulations to include compliance with the new reservation system starting in May. The division also requested three full-time enforcement officer positions, which were included in Gov. John Carney's Fiscal Year 2024 Recommended Budget, which will further increase enforcement efforts on Delaware State Parks beaches.

SURF FISHING CITATIONS 2022

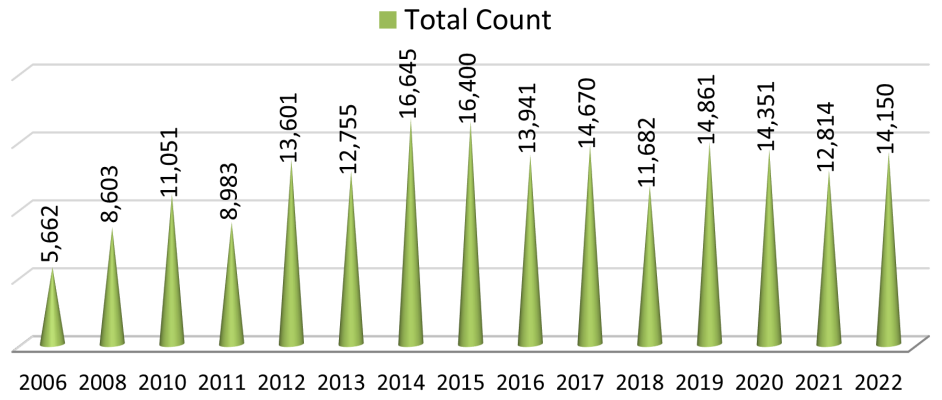
Not Actively Fishing.....	66
No Surf Permit.....	274
No Fish Tackle.....	10
Loan Permit.....	5
Safety Equipment.....	11

* warnings are not reflected in count

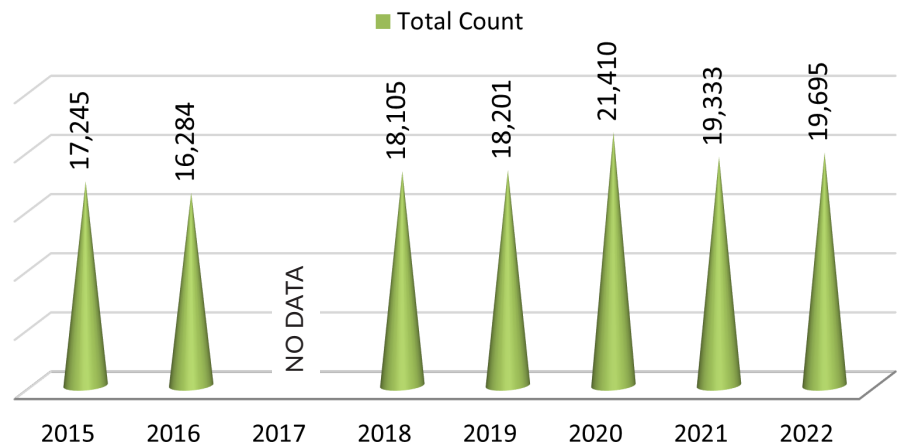
Pass, Permit Sales Agents May Now Be Compensated For Transaction Fees

In 2022, Rep. Ronald Gray and Sen. David Wilson sponsored House Bill 197 that allows retail agents who sell Delaware State Parks annual passes and surf fishing permits to charge a fee of up to \$2.50 for an annual pass and \$5 for a surf fishing permit. The legislation allows retail agents to provide the service without losing money on each sales transaction.

CHSP Total Count



DSSP Total Count



Every Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday between Memorial Day and Labor Day, between 11 a.m. - 2 p.m., every vehicle is counted on the surf fishing beach.



Doug Long Retirement

The division along with the entire downstate coastal area said "see you later" to now former Delaware Seashore State Park Superintendent Doug Long as he set off into retirement.

Working towards his B.S. in Recreation and Park Administration from University of Delaware, Doug started his career with the division in 1989 as a seasonal maintenance worker at Lums Pond State Park. Through his 30+ year run with Delaware State Parks his journey had him try on many job titles including Park Ranger at Cape Henlopen State Park, graduating first in his class from the Delaware State Police Academy in May 1993; Assistant Superintendent at Delaware Seashore State Park, Manager of the Indian River Marina and concluded with Park Superintendent of Delaware Seashore State Park.

Doug left the division at the end of 2022 with a heartfelt goodbye in his final report, "Thank you to the hundreds of people I've worked with who made me look good through their efforts!"



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