



DELAWARE STATE PARKS

Pilot Program Changes: 2023 Delaware Surf Fishing Permits

Changes to the Delaware Surf Fishing Permit Program will be piloted in 2023, with permit sales anticipated to start this December. The following information answers common questions and will be updated with new information as needed.

The Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control Division of Parks and Recreation worked with stakeholders and utilized public input to develop a program that will address past challenges and meet the goal of providing access to surf fishing on state park multi-use beaches while protecting the natural resource.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS CATEGORIES

- *2023 Surf Fishing Permit Program Pilot Changes*
- *Reason for Change*
- *Reservation System*
- *Surf Fishing Permit General Information*

2023 SURF FISHING PERMIT PROGRAM PILOT CHANGES

What are the pilot changes for the Delaware Surf Fishing Permit program?

- The existing annual surf fishing vehicle sales cap of 17,000 permits has been removed and an unlimited number of permits will be available.
- A reservation system will be implemented to 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., for annual and two-year surf fishing permit holders. This is a total of 36 days.
- All surf fishing permit holders will be required to view an instructional surf fishing/beach driving video prior to driving onto Delaware State Park beaches.

What types of surf fishing permits will be available in the 2023 program with the pilot changes?

Two types of surf fishing permits will be available in 2023:

- *2023 Annual and Two-Year Surf Fishing Permit* – Year-round vehicle access, including summer weekends and holidays; a reservation will now be required to drive onto state park beaches during peak time periods.
- *2023 Off-Peak Surf Fishing Permit* – Year-round vehicle access, excluding Saturdays, Sundays and holidays starting the third weekend in May through Labor Day weekend, 36 days total.

Will pricing change for the 2023 surf fishing permits?

Delaware Surf Fishing Permit pricing remains unchanged for 2023.

- A fee of \$4 per reservation will be charged to reserve drive-on access during peak times for the Annual and Two-Year Surf Fishing Permits. This fee is not included in the cost of the surf fishing permit.
- Permit rates will remain the same with Resident, Senior Resident, Senior Non-Resident, Non-Resident and Delaware Firefighter/EMT as options.

What about Two-Year Surf Fishing Permits that carry through 2023?

Anglers who purchased a Two-Year Surf Fishing Permit that expires in 2023 will be subject to the new reservation system.

A full refund of the second year will be available upon request at park offices, excluding agent locations. Refunds will be provided until March 31, 2023. The decal and permit paperwork must be turned in at time of refund.

Why is viewing an instructional surf fishing video required?

Identified as a best practice for drive-on beach fishing locations, the “How to Surf Fish” video provides beach driving tips, including understanding of airing down tires, mandatory equipment and safety requirements for surf fishing on state park beaches.

REASON FOR CHANGE

Why the pilot changes?

Since 2019, Delaware surf fishing permits have been capped at 17,000 annually and, over time, the popularity of the permits has significantly increased with 2022 permits selling out in just few hours. A number of changes have been implemented to improve the surf fishing experience. Removing the sales cap and adding the reservation system was found to be the best path forward to manage the limited amount of drive-on multi-use beaches while protecting the natural resource.

How was the decision made to remove the cap and set up a reservation system?

- In spring 2022, the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control Division of Parks and Recreation initiated an extensive process to identify best practices, gather input and develop recommendations.
- Key steps in the process included:
 - Surveys were sent to more than 30,000 current and previous surf fishing permit holders, with more than 7,000 responses.
 - Data was gathered about the existing surf fishing program and best practices used by organizations nationwide was researched to identify potential strategies.
 - A surf fishing permit stakeholder workgroup was created to evaluate the data and provide feedback about potential solutions.
 - The workgroup was comprised from various backgrounds including members of the Delaware General Assembly, Department of Transportation, Delaware Volunteer Firefighters Association, the Delaware Parks and Recreation Advisory Council, Delaware Mobile Surf Fishermen, business and community stakeholders, and experts in environmental science from Delaware universities.

The surf fishing permit stakeholder workgroup recommendations were presented and endorsed by the Parks and Recreation Council in August 2022.

RESERVATION SYSTEM

What are the guidelines for the Annual and Two-Year Surf Fishing Permit reservation system?

For Annual and Two-Year Surf Fishing Permits, reservations will be required on Saturdays and Sundays starting the third weekend in May through Labor Day, and on four summer holidays (Memorial Day, Juneteenth, Fourth of July, Labor Day). During these times, annual and two-year surf fishing permit holders are permitted to fish on the beach only with a reservation.

- One reservation will be allowed per annual and two-year surf permit holder per day. Reservations are non-refundable and non-transferable.

How will the new reservation system work for those with Annual and Two-Year Surf Fishing Permits?

Details of the reservation systems are still being finalized. The system is proposed to work as follows:

- For Annual and Two-Year Surf Fishing Permits, peak-period reservations will be available online (desktop and mobile) or through the DNREC Division of Parks and Recreation 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.
- Weekend reservations will be made available weekly. Reservations will be first-come, first-served and will open midweek for the coming weekend, including holidays. No exceptions will be made for any type of permit.

What is the \$4 reservation fee going towards?

The \$4 reservation fee covers additional enforcement resources, and administrative costs such as staffing to manage the reservation process.

Are Delaware firefighters and EMTs subject to the \$4 reservation fee?

Yes, Delaware firefighters and EMTs are subject to the \$4 reservation fee.

Where will reservations be required for surf fishing permit anglers?

During peak weekends and holidays, reservations will be required at all Delaware State Parks drive-on multi-use beaches. Reservations will reserve a beach location, but not a specific spot on that beach. Each location will have a limited number of reservations available; the numbers of reservations available for each location will be announced prior to the launch of the reservation system in May 2023.

The current seven surf fishing reservable areas are:

- Delaware Seashore – North Key Box/Conquest/Faithful Steward
- Delaware Seashore – South 3Rs
- Fenwick Island – York/Middle Crossing/South Crossing
- Beach Plum Island
- South Cape Henlopen – Gordons Pond and Herring Point
- North Cape Henlopen – Point Crossing
- Cape Henlopen – Navy Crossing

Reservations will reserve a beach location, but not a specific spot on that beach. Each location will have a limited number of reservations available.

How many spots will be available and what is the spacing allotment?

Information about vehicle spacing on drive-on beaches will be available prior to the launch of the reservation system in May 2023.

When will the reservation system be launched?

The reservation system will be launched in May 2023 with detailed instructions.

During peak times, what times will a reservation be required for Annual and Two-Year Surf Fishing Permits?

Reservations will be required on Saturdays and Sundays starting the third weekend in May through Labor Day, and on four summer holidays (Memorial Day, Juneteenth, Fourth or July, Labor Day). Reservations can be made through 4 p.m. on the day of use, if space allows. Specific details will be available to the public before the new system goes live.

Annual and two-year 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.

Will a reservation be required for those that walk onto the surf fishing beaches?

Delaware State Parks surf fishing beaches are multi-use beaches and the reservation system is only applicable for drive-on access only. Those who choose to walk on are not required to obtain a reservation, just as they are not required to possess a surf permit. They are, however, required to possess a valid Delaware fishing license if they intend to fish.

What happens if reservation holders are “no-shows” and there is obvious excess capacity?

The spot will continue to be held for those with reservations and that permit holder can show up any time during their reservation period. A reservation is non-refundable and non-transferrable.

What happens if the park reaches capacity and I have a surf fishing permit reservation?

Annual and two-year surf fishing permit holders with reservations will be allowed into the park for surf fishing even if a park gate is closed when parking capacity is reached.

Who is patrolling and enforcing the system?

Patrolling and enforcement of the reservation system will be handled by Division of Parks and Recreation enforcement officers as before.

Why a reservation system?

Reservation systems have been gaining popularity as a fair and efficient way to manage natural resources in local, state and national parks across the country.

Delaware State Parks successfully initiated a reservation system for campsites years ago and now processes nearly 50,000 reservations annually.

Can the Division utilize a one-out, one-in queuing method like at Assateague Island?

Not at this time. None of the Delaware State Parks drive-on beach crossings offer adequate space for vehicle queuing. For beach crossings with parking lots, queuing would restrict day use customer parking and emergency access. Queuing at Fenwick Island State Park would force vehicles to wait in line along the shoulder of Route 1, which was intended to provide bike and pedestrian access and would pose safety risks.

SURF FISHING PERMIT GENERAL INFORMATION

When will sales start for 2023 surf fishing permits?

Sales are anticipated to start this December. There is no need to rush to purchase a permit for 2023 as there will be no sales cap.

When will I receive surf fishing permits purchased online?

Once purchased, the estimated timeframe is that surf fishing permits will take three to four weeks for delivery.

Why can't Delaware residents get priority reservations for surf fishing permits?

The Division of Parks and Recreation has received funding from the U.S. Land & Water Conservation Fund and is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of residence, including preferential reservation, membership or annual permit systems. Reservations, membership or annual permit systems available to residents must also be available to nonresidents and the period of availability must be the same for both state residents and non-residents.

What is the purpose of DNREC surf fishing permits?

Because driving on the beach can cause damage to vegetation and wildlife and contributes to shoreline erosion, the DNREC Division of Parks and Recreation limits vehicles on the beach to designated surf fishing areas for the sole purpose of actively engaging in fishing.

What if I have more questions or feedback regarding the Surf Fishing Permit program pilot changes?

Additional surf fishing permit related questions and input can be emailed to DelawareSurfPermits@delaware.gov.