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P R E S S R E L E A S E

As July 4th Weekend Approaches DEEP Recommends How to be Safe on Land and Sea

With the July 4th holiday weekend upon us, the 2015 summer outdoor recreation season is in full swing and Connecticut's Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) urges residents and visitors to enjoy Connecticut's outdoors – but to do so safely.

"Our 109 state parks and 32 state forests are ready for summer visitors and opportunities for families to enjoy the great outdoors. We also have 118 state boat launches to get you onto your favorite waterbody." said DEEP Commissioner Robert Klee. "No matter what your favorite activity – hiking, swimming, boating, fishing, picnicking or simply soaking in some peace and quiet – Connecticut offers many convenient, safe, and attractive places to visit. We encourage families to visit our parks, forests, and waterways as often as they can this summer and to observe all the rules that are posted as well as all common sense safety precautions. We want everyone to have a positive experience in the outdoors."

Safe Boating

When it comes to boating, Connecticut offers it all - streams, rivers, lakes and Long Island Sound, which offer a wide variety of opportunities for boaters. DEEP offers the following safety tips for those going out on the water. Visit: www.ct.gov/deep/boating

- Take a boating or canoe/kayak safety class – a boating certificate is required to operate a registered boat.
- Double check the condition of all water and fuel hoses and their connections as part of your pre-safety boat check. Also be sure to file a float plan. You can find apps for that! It allows you to send a float plan to a friend or family member.
- Obtain a free Vessel Safety Check – contact the DEEP Boating Division or your local USCG Auxiliary and US Power Squadron. If you use a state boat launch, look for our Boating Education Assistants who will perform a free safety check.
- Wear Your Life Jacket - Statistics show that more than three-quarters of the people that died in boating accidents between 2010 and 2014 drowned. Of those, 90% were not wearing a life jacket. Life jackets are more comfortable and lightweight than ever. Putting one on before heading out could save your life, so "Wear It Connecticut!"
- In our cooler Northeast waters, someone that falls in the water can lose their ability to perform necessary life-saving functions quite quickly. Falling into colder waters also invokes an involuntary gasp reflex – a number one cause of drowning.

- When waterskiing/tubing shut the engine off when putting someone in the water, switching out equipment or retrieving the person. Always approach person in the water from driver's side. Make sure there is a spotter who understands the importance of their job to watch the skier/tuber at all times and communicate immediately to the operator if the person falls off or signals they want to stop.
- Drink responsibly – alcohol was a contributing factor for 47% of the victims that died in Connecticut boating accidents between 2008 and 2012. Sun, wind, noise, vibration, and motion are all considered "stressors" common to the boating environment. They intensify the effects of alcohol, drugs, and some medications by causing fatigue, which greatly reduces a boat operator's coordination, judgment, and reaction time. The use of alcohol also makes the body more susceptible to the effects of cold water.
- Follow us on Facebook at BoatingInConnecticut.
- Follow us on Twitter @CTBoatngInfo or DEEP Boating. We will be tweeting timely information on boat ramp status (temporary closures when at capacity, etc.), pumpout facility information and upcoming boating classes.

Safe Swimming

DEEP offers 23 designated state park swim areas – four on Long Island Sound and 19 inland lakes and ponds. www.ct.gov/deep/beachstatus

There are also many municipal swim areas throughout the state.

The following safety tips should be observed by those headed to the beach:

- Swim in designated areas - Connecticut State Parks offer many swimming opportunities, from small swimming holes amid hiking trails, to expansive open water swimming in Long Island Sound. Designated swimming areas offer certain layers of protection: from ensuring water quality, to identifying a five foot water depth, to protecting swimmers from boating traffic, and to oversight by highly trained lifeguards. Please swim in these areas whenever possible.
- Be aware that underwater hazards exist and NEVER dive in head first - the natural beauty of these swimming areas extends under the water. Unlike the smooth level bottom of swimming pools, lakes/ponds and the Long Island Sound have uneven bottoms, with potential drop-offs, sand-bars, in-shore holes, and boulders. Be cautious when enjoying these natural areas.
- Parents must watch their children- When children are playing in the water, the safest spot for a parent or guardian to be is within arm's reach of them. It only takes seconds for a child to drown, please take this easy preventive measure.

Alcohol and water don't mix -- alcohol has been a contributing factor in 13 of the 16 drowning deaths that lifeguards have responded to at state parks within the last decade. Excessive alcohol consumption leads to poor decision-making, poor coordination, and poor reaction time. Do not drink alcohol and swim.

Safe Hiking

Blue-Blazed Hiking Trail System

Connecticut has a wide variety of hiking trails including the Blue-Blazed Hiking Trail System – with more than 825 miles marked with blue rectangular blazes. This trail system offers a great way to explore the woodlands, remote ridges, and wild places of Connecticut. The trails are open year-round to all forms of foot travel (unless otherwise posted).

Connecticut's State Parks and Forests

This year, for the first time, Connecticut State Parks is sponsoring the "**Sky's the Limit**" 2015, a Hiking Challenge, designed to promote hiking in Connecticut's State Parks and Forests throughout 2015. Hikers will enjoy the opportunity to hike to 14 of Connecticut's high peaks and receive prizes for their efforts as part of a new program.

Participants in this friendly competition have the opportunity to receive a medallion for hiking up 10 designated locations. On January 1, 2016 names will be drawn from all who completed the 14 designated hikes and fifty winners will receive a hand-carved hiking staff. To learn more visit: www.ct.gov/deep/skysthelimit

Greenways

"Greenways" are corridors of open space that may protect natural resources, preserve scenic landscapes and historical resources or offer opportunities for recreation or non-motorized transportation and may connect existing protected areas and provide access to the outdoors. Visit: www.ct.gov/deep/greenways

Safe Hiking Tips

Although Connecticut State Parks can be limited in acreage in comparison to some of the larger National Parks across the country, they offer adventure and awe inspiring beauty. Parks still have some of the same hazards found in expansive wilderness areas. It's important for visitors to plan ahead to prepare for a visit to the outdoors, have proper equipment and prepare for the inevitable. And most importantly know your limitations.

As the 2015 summer outdoor recreation kicks off DEEP officials offer the following hiking safety advice when visiting a park or forest.

- Dress appropriately and be prepared for any sudden changes in the weather. Dress in layers and avoid cotton. Hikers can choose from a variety of fabrics that wick moisture. It's a good idea to wear a lightweight shirt that wicks moisture and carry a fleece and lightweight rain jacket.
- Invest in good hiking socks and sturdy hiking shoes or boots.
- Avoid hiking alone. If you do hike alone pick a well-used trail and tell someone where you'll be and when you plan to return.
- Stay on the trail. Taking shortcuts and bushwacking increases your chances of getting lost and increases erosion.
- Never climb on waterfalls or attempt to cross streams above waterfalls. Injuries and death can occur.
- Carry a small lightweight backpack

- Always carry rain gear. To avoid hypothermia it's important to remain warm and dry.
- Carry plenty of drinking water and never assume stream water is safe to drink.
- Carry food or energy bars
- Don't count on cell phones to work if you are lost. If they do work, be able to give details about your current location and remain there until rescuers arrive.
- Carry a First Aid Kit and other personal care items such as medications.
- Carry a small flashlight

Whatever you choose for your outdoor activity, plan ahead, have proper equipment and prepare for the unexpected. And most importantly, have a safe and healthy visit to Connecticut's outdoors.