

Department of Environmental Protection
Natural & Historic Resources
Office of Leases & Concessions
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Caven Point Natural Area RFP Comments

The Caven Point Natural Area, at Liberty State Park and behind Lady Liberty, is an urban habitat and environmental education wonderland. There is with nothing similar anywhere nearby. Without question, it should remain that way.

Caven Point is a 21.5-acre peninsula stretching into the Upper New York Bay. It contains approximately fifteen upland acres including the largest stretch of natural beach in the Upper New York Bay and Hudson River, measuring approximately one-half mile. The remaining 6.5 acres are wetlands and subtidal natural habitat. Caven Point is accessible on foot or bicycle from Liberty State Park and the surrounding neighborhoods by the Hudson River Walkway that traverses the southwestern border of the site.

Nowhere else from the George Washington Bridge to Perth Amboy is there this type of direct public access and contact with the Bay's water and marine life from a Sandy Beach. For this very reason, Caven Point was acquired using both NJDEP Green Acres and Federal Land and Water Conservation Funds, and why it is listed on the NJDEPs Natural Area Register.

Caven Point is used extensively for a variety of unique urban environmental education programs. Liberty State Park Interpretive staff provide schoolchildren the exhilarating opportunity to put on waders and drag a seine net through their home waters. They capture, learn about, and release fish, crabs, seahorses, and other marine life found in our NY/NJ Harbor Estuary.

The Urban Estuary for Young Scientists program expands the interpretive offerings to include water sampling and testing and scientific research. *Save a Place for Wildlife* is a program geared for a younger audience, which utilizes the Caven Point beach and boardwalk. The program focuses on salt marsh and beach habitats and provides students with an opportunity for hands-on exploration. Other programs include low tide walks, bird walks, volunteer beach cleanups, and stewardship activities such as dune grass planting. For more than a decade between 500-600 children per year have benefitted from this program.

Furthermore, Caven Point provides exceptional natural resource and ecological value to Liberty State Park and the surrounding estuary region. Caven Point contains a sandy beach, wetlands, saltwater marshland, tidal pools, mud flats and upland maritime forest. These ecological

components provide critical habitat and seven nesting grounds for a variety of in-water, brackish and upland flora and fauna species year-round.

The site also provides an opportunity for public recreation and eco-tourism, given its ideal location for migrating birds. Park visitors have reported eyewitness accounts of notable species including, but not limited to, snowy owl, deer, northern diamondback terrapin, peregrine falcon, osprey, harbor seals, horseshoe crab, yellow-crowned night-heron, black-crowned night-heron, red knot, black skimmer, northern harrier, American oystercatcher, blue heron, horned lark, winter flounder and Atlantic sturgeon.

Notably, it is also home to two majestic annual natural migrations – prehistoric horseshoe crabs that come in from the Atlantic Ocean and bright orange and black monarch butterflies that travel from central Mexico.

Caven Point's natural bounty fulfills one of LSP's key missions, which is "to provide the public with access to the harbor's resources, a sense of its history and the charge of responsibility for its continued improvement." Kayakers, small-boat sailors, canoeists, anglers, crabbers, sunbathers, dog walkers as well as wind surfers use the beach and surrounding tidal flats for recreational access. In 2015, 29 sessions were offered with a total of 225 participants and generating approximately \$4,500 in revenue toward the park maintenance budget.

Along with state and federal regulations that specify natural land preservation for this peninsula, Caven Point must be preserved as is because it has also been used as an official mitigation area to offset nearby contamination impacts. In 2000, the site was remediated of chromium and hydrocarbons by the responsible party through a settlement agreement. NJDEP's Office of Natural Resources Damages also required the construction of an access bridge crossing Caven Creek in the southern portion of the site. This connects to the Hudson River Walkway, an educational boardwalk trail for park naturalists and visitors when not shut off to protect areas where birds mate on the eastern portion of the site, a two-acre salt marsh and a one-acre freshwater wetland.

Changing portions of Caven Point from natural area preservation and environmental education to proposed "recreation" is subject to Federal approval. This is because the peninsula, which is part of a site on the New Jersey Register of Natural Areas, was purchased by the state in 1981 with \$2.3 million in state Green Acres money and a National Park Service grant.

The public overwhelmingly agrees with Sam Pesin, President of the Friends of Liberty State Park when he says, "Caven Point was bought for eternity to be a natural area for the park and serve people in a densely populated urban area that would otherwise have to travel far away to gain these enriching environmental education experiences."

Why with 60 days left in an eight-year term of office would the Christie Administration would choose to lease away this invaluable natural habitat for some yet unspecified "recreation use" is beyond perplexing and wrongheaded!

The Friends of Liberty State Park and NY/NJ Baykeeper along with the public and many allies will work tirelessly to enforce the original intent, laws, and regulation aimed at ensuring the public will continue to enjoy, in perpetuity, the splendid natural gifts of this rare urban gem.

Sincerely,

Greg Remaud
Deputy Director
NY/NJ Baykeeper

Sam Pesin
President
Friends of Liberty State Park