

Delaware Canal

pennsylvania
DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION
AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Pennsylvania State Parks Mission

The primary purpose of Pennsylvania State Parks is to provide opportunities for enjoying healthful outdoor recreation and serve as outdoor classrooms for environmental education. In meeting these purposes, the conservation of the natural, scenic, aesthetic, and historical values of the parks should be given first consideration. Stewardship responsibilities should be carried out in a way that protects the natural outdoor experience for the enjoyment of current and future generations.



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DELAWARE CANAL STATE PARK



A walk along the 58.89-mile-long towpath of Delaware Canal State Park is a stroll into American history. Paralleling the Delaware River between Easton and Bristol, this diverse park contains a historic canal and towpath, a 50-acre pond, many miles of river shoreline, and 11 river islands. From riverside to farm fields to historic towns, Delaware Canal State Park visitors can enjoy the ever-changing scenery along its corridor.

A NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK

The 58.89-mile Delaware Canal is the only remaining continuously intact canal of the great towpath canal-building era in the early and mid-19th century. Today, the canal retains almost all of its features as they existed during its century of commercial operation.

America was growing rapidly in the early 1800s. Canals provided a better way of transporting goods and resources, such as coal, to urban areas.

After seeing the success of the Erie Canal in New York, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania began to build a system of canals to connect Lake Erie, Pittsburgh, and Philadelphia. While not directly connected to the rest of the state canal system, the Delaware Canal did connect with the Lehigh Canal system at Easton when it was completed in 1832. The canal also connected to the Morris and Delaware & Raritan canals in New Jersey via river crossings. The Lehigh and Delaware canals provided a convenient and economical means of transporting coal and other goods to Philadelphia, New York, and the eastern seaboard.



In 1958, the commonwealth sold the entirety of the canal to the privately owned Lehigh Coal and Navigation Company. As the years progressed and transportation technology advanced, the use of canals to transport goods became increasingly less efficient by comparison. The last commercial canal boat completed its journey through the Delaware Canal on October 17, 1931. On the same day in 1931, 40 miles of the

canal were returned to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The commonwealth reacquired the remaining 20 miles in 1940.

The U.S. Congress officially recognized the canal's importance to the economic development of America by establishing the Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor in 1988. The canal is a registered National Historic Landmark and its towpath is a National Recreation Trail.

A DAY ON THE CANAL

The day of the boatman is long gone, but if you stand on the towpath and listen, with some imagination you can hear ancient echos – the rhythmic clip-clop of a team of mules pulling a coal-filled boat and the softer steps of a barefoot 12-year-old, the boatman's son, leading the mule team along the towpath. The sun is just starting to rise, but already the Delaware Canal has been buzzing with activity for several hours. Boatmen have begun their long day, one that will last until after 10:00 PM, when they tie up for the night and their mules are finally unharnessed, fed, brushed, and bedded down.

To the east, the mighty Delaware River runs parallel to the canal and is separated only by a thin sliver of land, lined with sycamores, oaks, poplars, and river birch.

As a canal boat glides quietly by, an array of enticing aromas wafts up the towpath. Frying eggs and slabs of bacon sizzle on the deck-top stove while extra-strong coffee brews.

Some boats are headed down to Bristol and on to Philadelphia, filled with 80 or 90 tons of anthracite coal. These barges ride low in the water. Others are empty and ride high. They are heading upstream to Easton and then on to the Lehigh Canal for the trek to the town of Mauch Chunk (now called Jim Thorpe), to reload and do it all over again...and again...

The sound of a boatman blowing his conch shell horn rings out across the water, warning the locktender of the approaching boat. If there's one thing these rough, tough, always-in-a-hurry boatmen hate, it is spending one minute more than necessary at a lock. On the canal, time is money.



LEARN, EXPERIENCE, CONNECT



Delaware Canal State Park offers a wide variety of programs year round. Gain a better understanding of the park's natural, cultural, and historical resources through guided outdoor recreation, hands-on activities, walks, special events, and other programs.

Curriculum-based environmental education programs are available to schools and organized groups. Call the park office to schedule a group program. A variety of professional development workshops are also offered for teachers.

Contact the park office or explore the online calendar of events, <https://events.dcnr.pa.gov>, for more information on public programs and other learning experiences.

The Locktender's House, in the popular destination town of New Hope, gives insight into the history of the canal and serves as the headquarters for the Friends of Delaware Canal.

DELAWARE & LEHIGH NATIONAL HERITAGE CORRIDOR

Delaware Canal State Park is part of the Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor. The corridor stretches more than 150 miles in eastern Pennsylvania from Wilkes-Barre to Bristol and follows the historic routes of the Lehigh & Susquehanna Railroad, the Lehigh Canal system, and the Delaware Canal. Through diverse partnerships, the corridor showcases the extraordinary natural, cultural, and recreational resources which conserve the heritage and enhance the quality of life for its many residents. There are numerous places throughout the corridor that tell the stories that make the region so nationally significant. <https://delawareandlehigh.org>



Reenactment of a mule tender leading the mules down the towpath with the canal boat in tow.

RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Spend The Day

TRAILS: The 58.89-mile-long canal towpath runs from Easton to Bristol and is a National Recreation Trail. Once trod by mule teams pulling boats along the canal, the towpath is used today by walkers, joggers, bicyclists, cross-country skiers, and bird watchers.

Across the Delaware River in New Jersey, the 70-mile-long Delaware & Raritan (D&R) Canal State Park is another popular recreation corridor for canoeing, jogging, hiking, bicycling, fishing, and horseback riding. The canal and park are also part of the National Recreation Trail System.

Together, Delaware Canal State Park and D&R Canal State Park form a series of looping trails connecting Pennsylvania and New Jersey via seven bridges. By parking in one of several areas located along the loop trail, visitors have easy access to the canal towpaths in both states, and can ride, walk, or jog a complete loop back to their car. Loop trail connection bridges are in the Pennsylvania towns of Uhlerstown, Lumberville, Center Bridge, New Hope, Washington Crossing, Morrisville, and Lower Makefield Township.



This 30-mile stretch of parallel trails allows visitors to choose among several different options of length and distance. Each loop will lead visitors through quaint towns, wooded forests, and past scenic river views. A perfect extended weekend could include riding the trails by day and staying overnight at one of the many bed and breakfasts along the way.

Tell us about your hike at: www.ExplorePATrails.com

FISHING: The Delaware River contains many species of game fish including American shad, striped bass, smallmouth bass, and walleye. Shad migration starts in early spring.

The Delaware Canal and Giving Pond also contain a variety of warmwater game fish.

Bowfishing is prohibited in the Delaware Canal. Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission regulations and laws apply.

BOATING: Canoeing and kayaking are popular in the canal, on the Delaware River, and at the Giving Pond.

Non-powered boats can launch into the Delaware River from several access areas within Delaware Canal State Park. There are



also public motorized boat launches located along the Delaware in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, from which boaters can enjoy the water trail which includes scenic views of River Islands and Nockamixon Cliffs natural areas. This area is a major migratory route for raptors, waterfowl, and songbirds, creating a great place for water trail users to view wildlife.

CAUTION – The river poses hazards and visitors should use caution on and around the river.

Motorboats must display a current boat registration. Non-powered boats launched in the park must display one of the following: boat registration from any state; launch permit or mooring permit from Pennsylvania State Parks, available at most state park offices; launch use permit from the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission.

BIRDING: With its combination of shallow waterways, river islands, green spaces, and cliff faces, Delaware Canal State Park offers an abundance of habitats for birds and other wildlife. At least 154 bird species call the Delaware Canal home. Birds often sighted along the canal include: herons, double-crested cormorants, osprey, bald eagles, and a large variety of songbirds.

Natural Lands Trust and Bucks County Audubon Society also participate in birding programs at Delaware Canal State Park.

HUNTING: Hunting in Delaware Canal State Park is restricted to archery deer hunting only in designated area during appropriate seasons. All other types of hunting and trapping are prohibited.



THE DELAWARE RIVER

At 330 miles in length, the Delaware is the longest free-flowing river east of the Mississippi River and serves as a major migration corridor for birds and fish like American shad. Delaware Canal State Park maintains six public recreation areas with

shoreline access to the river. Additional access points are available through other state parks, state agencies, federal, and private lands. Of the many islands in the river, 11 are protected as the Delaware River Islands State Park Natural Area.

The 65-mile segment of the Lower Delaware River and selected tributaries are part of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. This designation recognizes free-flowing rivers with exceptional natural, recreational, historical, and cultural resources.

THE AMERICAN SHAD

American shad - *Alosa sapidissima*

- The American shad is the largest member of the herring family. Spawning adults commonly reach four to eight pounds and can range in length from 19 inches (males) to 24 inches (females).
- Female shad are called “roes” and males are called “bucks.”
- Shad are an anadromous migratory species - they are born in freshwater, spend three to six years at sea, and return to the area of their birth to spawn, similar to salmon species.
- Adult shad do not eat on the way to their freshwater spawning grounds. Unlike Pacific salmon, not all shad die after spawning and will eat on their return trip to the sea.

For centuries, there has been a dynamic interaction between the Delaware River and the people and cultures that have lived and worked in its basin. One of the best examples of this interaction is the story of the American shad. Because of its predictable migrations, shad have served as an important resource to many cultures throughout history.

The Lenape depended on shad as a staple of their diet. They grilled them on wooden racks, air dried, and smoked them. Shad were also an important part of life for the early colonial settlers in the Delaware Valley.

As human populations grew, pollution from sewage and industrial wastewater increased. By the early twentieth century, key fish populations of the Philadelphia waterfront had all but collapsed due to pollution, habitat destruction, and overfishing.

Water pollution worsened during World War II. In 1946, the Delaware Estuary experienced a 20-mile “dead zone,” meaning there was a reduced level of dissolved oxygen in the water. Low levels of dissolved oxygen prevented all migrating fish, including the American shad, from passing into their native spawning grounds. In 1961, the Delaware River Basin Commission launched a pollution control effort which greatly improved water quality. Unfortunately, pollution was not the only barrier affecting the American shad.

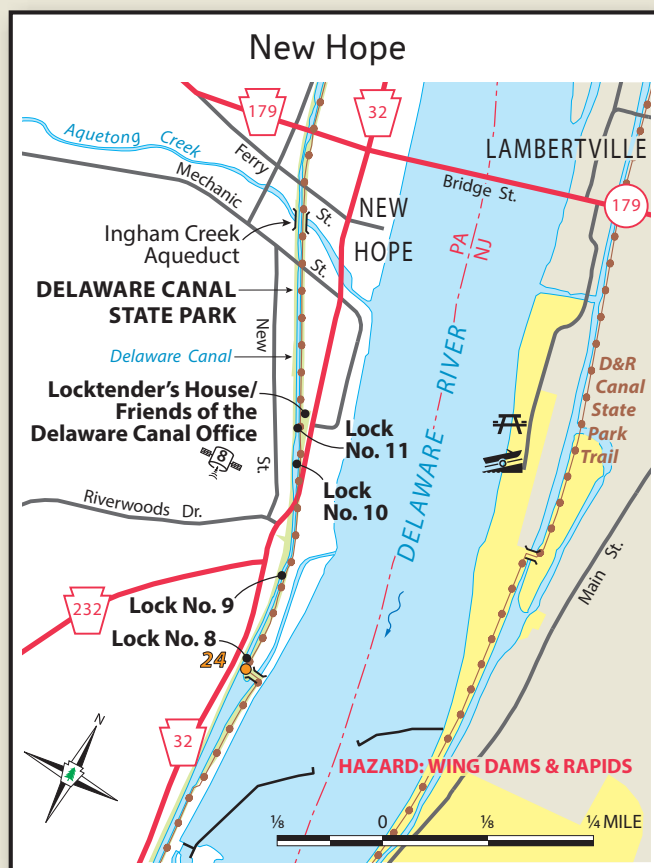
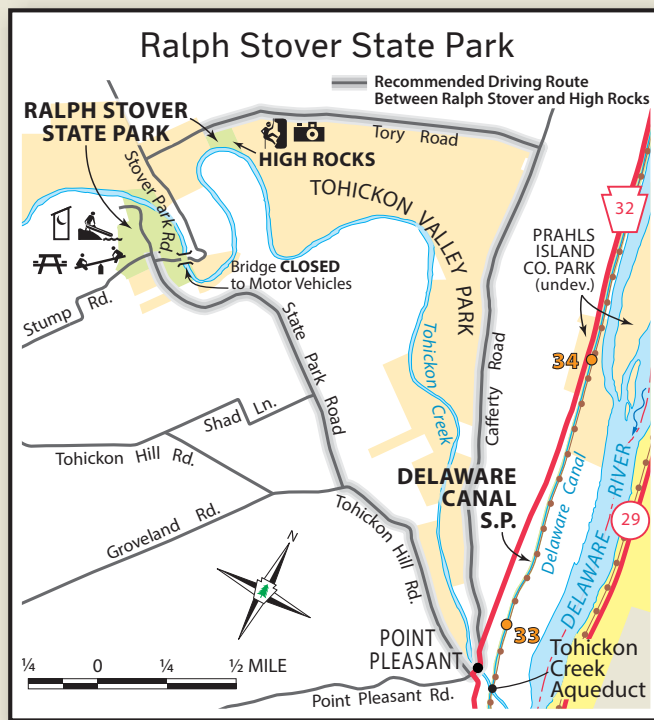
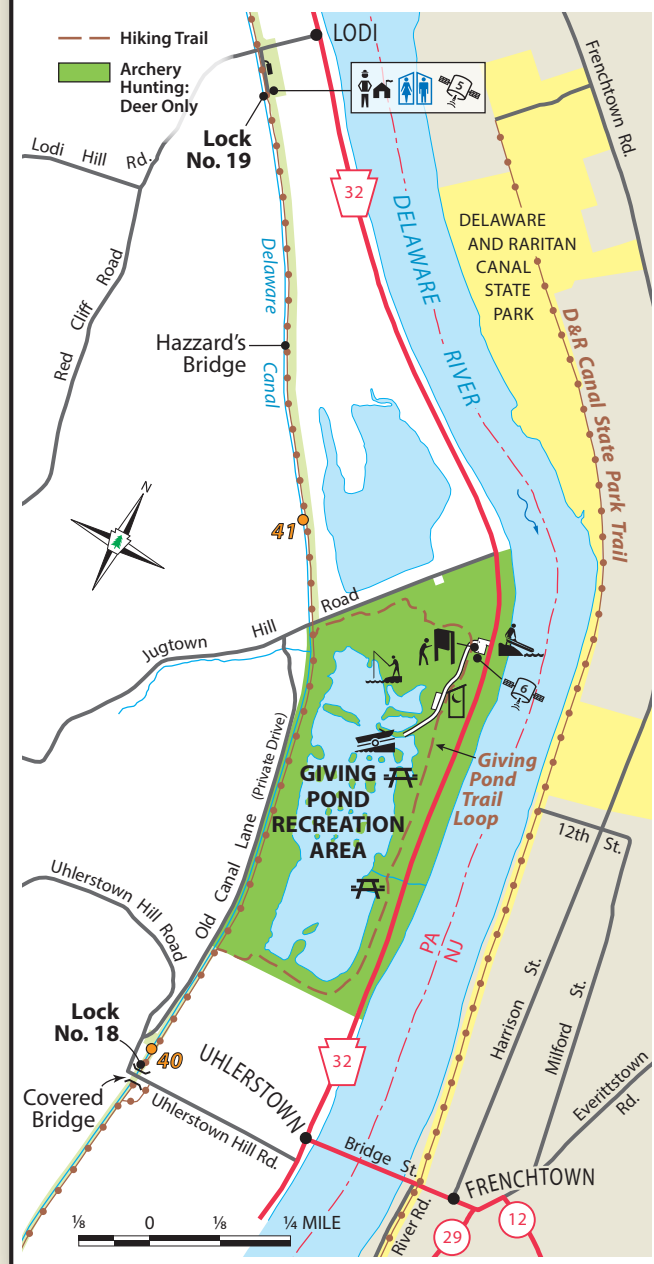
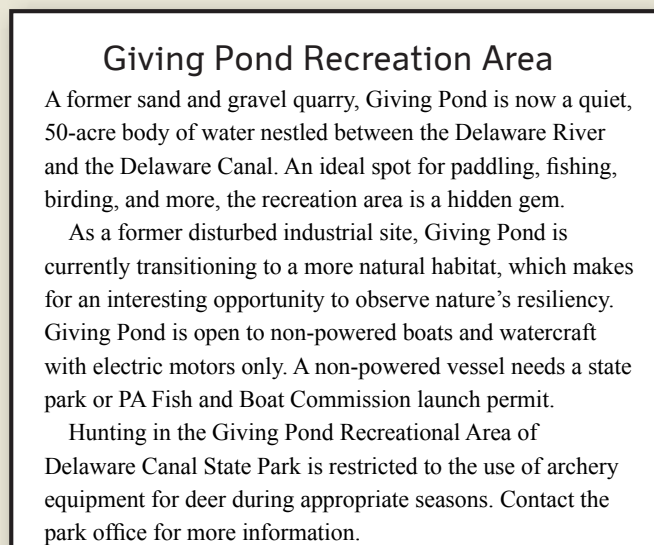
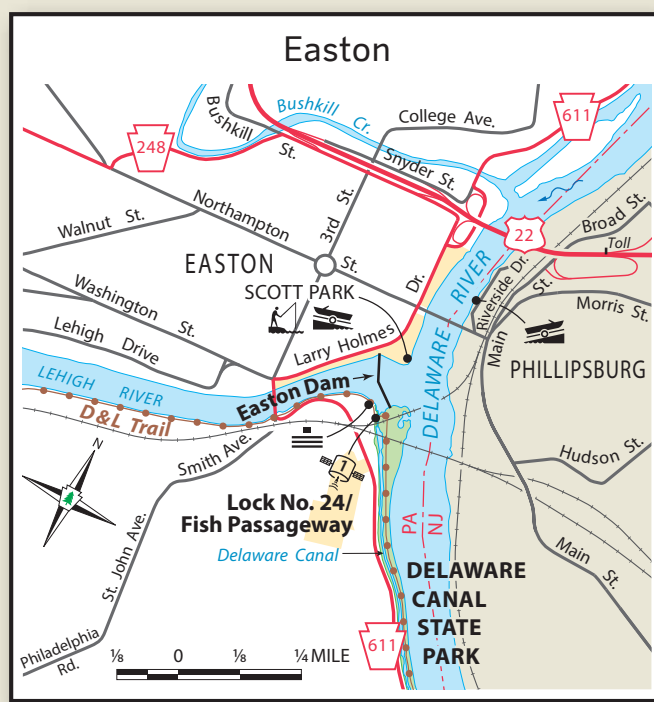
During the great canal building era of the 1830s, rivers were dammed to ensure water supplies for the canals. Two dams vital to the Delaware and Lehigh Canal systems disrupted the shad migration up the Lehigh River, preventing the fish from reaching their spawning grounds.



To help shad re-establish their native spawning grounds on the Lehigh River, while keeping the historic canals intact, park staff have maintained two fish passageways since 1993.

These “ladders” allow the fish to navigate upstream around the dams and on to spawning grounds in the Lehigh River as far north as the Frances E. Walter Dam in White Haven, Pa.

DELAWARE CANAL STATE PARK



NATURAL AREAS

Pennsylvania state park natural areas are of unique scenic, geological, or ecological value. These areas are maintained in a natural condition by allowing physical and biological processes to operate, usually without human intervention. Natural areas are set aside to provide locations for scientific observation of natural systems; to protect examples of typical and unique plant and animal communities; and to protect outstanding examples of natural interest and beauty.

Delaware Canal State Park has two designated state park natural areas, Nockamixon Cliffs and River Islands. These unique natural environments contain threatened or endangered species. Visitors are welcome to explore these areas but must follow Leave No Trace Principles, such as leave what you find, dispose of waste properly, respect wildlife, and travel on durable surfaces. Camping, hunting, and trapping are prohibited within a natural area, including the river islands.

River Islands

The eleven state park river islands - Morgan Hill group (3), Loors, Whippoorwill, Old Sow, Raubs, Lynn/Frog/Rock group, and Hendrick - are protected natural areas within a river corridor that is experiencing dramatic economic growth. The islands provide critical habitat for migratory waterfowl and songbirds, contain sites of archaeological importance, and enhance recreational opportunities for anglers and paddlers.

Some river islands, such as Hendrick Island, were originally part of the main shoreline. However, most islands grew individually from the river itself. Silt and stone left by glacial waters almost 10,000 years ago form the base of these islands. Seeds were eventually deposited by wind, water, and wildlife.

As plants grow on the islands, the roots bind the substrate materials together. Although they are relatively stable, the size, shape, and location of the islands shift over time with the movement of the river.

Nockamixon Cliffs

Topography, geology, and scenic beauty combine to create the unique character of the Nockamixon Cliffs Natural Area. These sheer cliffs tower 300 feet above the Delaware River and dominate the landscape. Because the cliffs face north, they receive little direct sunlight. This cool habitat supports an alpine-arctic plant community unusual this far south.



Formation of the Nockamixon Cliffs began in the Triassic period when tall mountains to the northwest were heavily eroded, depositing red sand and mud in shallow lakes. Great pressure turned the sand and mud into red sandstone and shale that can still be found throughout the region.

These rocks are a dull red and break easily into flakes and fragments.

Toward the end of the Triassic Period, molten magma from deep within the earth's crust flowed into these beds of sedimentary rock. The igneous intrusion heated the surrounding sandstone and shale, changing them into tough, weather resistant rock called hornfels. During the Jurassic Period, the region

was subjected to continuous erosion. While other rocks were worn away like the sandstone and shale, the hornfels resisted weathering, allowing the Nockamixon Cliffs to "rise" above the surrounding landscape.

NEARBY PARKS AND NATURAL AREAS

BOWMAN'S HILL WILDFLOWER PRESERVE
1635 River Road (PA. 32)
New Hope, PA 18938
215-862-2924
www.bhwp.org

DELAWARE & LEHIGH NATIONAL HERITAGE CORRIDOR NATIONAL CANAL MUSEUM
2750 Hugh Moore Park Road
Easton, PA 18042
610-923-3548
https://delawareandlehigh.org
www.canals.org

DELAWARE AND RARITAN CANAL STATE PARK
145 Mapleton Road
Princeton, NJ 08540
609-924-5705
www.dandrcanal.com

LOCKTENDER'S HOUSE: DELAWARE CANAL MUSEUM & FRIENDS OF THE DELAWARE CANAL OFFICE
145 S. Main Street
New Hope, PA 18938,
215-862-2021
www.fodc.org

JACOBSBURG ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CENTER
400 Belfast Road
Nazareth, PA 18064
610-746-2801
www.visitPAparks.com

NESHAMINY STATE PARK
3401 State Road
Bensalem, PA 19020
215-639-4538
www.visitPAparks.com

NOCKAMIXON STATE PARK
1542 Mountain View Drive
Quakertown, PA 18951-5732
215-529-7300
www.visitPAparks.com

RALPH STOVER STATE PARK
6011 State Park Road
Pipersville, PA 18947
610-982-5560
www.visitPAparks.com

SILVER LAKE PARK AND NATURE CENTER
1306 Bath Road
Bristol, PA 19007
215-785-1177
https://silverlakenaturecenter.org

TINICUM COUNTY PARK
903 River Road (PA. 32)
Erwinna, PA 18920
215-757-0571
www.buckscounty.org

TOHICKON VALLEY COUNTY PARK
127 Cafferty Road
Point Pleasant, PA 18947
215-297-0754
www.buckscounty.org

TYLER STATE PARK
101 Swamp Road
Newtown, PA 18940
215-968-2021
www.visitPAparks.com

WASHINGTON CROSSING HISTORIC PARK
1112 River Road
Washington Crossing, PA 18977
215-493-4076
www.visitPAparks.com

INFORMATION

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An Equal Opportunity Employer
www.visitPAparks.com

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Access for People with Disabilities

This symbol indicates facilities and activities that are Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible for people with disabilities. This publication text is available in alternative formats.

If you need an accommodation to participate in park activities due to a disability, please contact the park you plan to visit.

In an Emergency

Call 911 and contact a park employee. Directions to the nearest hospital are posted on bulletin boards and at the park office

NEAREST HOSPITALS:
North - St. Luke's Hospital - Anderson Campus
1872 St. Luke's Boulevard
Easton, PA, 18045
866-STLUKES

Central - Doylestown Hospital
595 West State Street
Doylestown, PA 18901
215-345-2200

South - Lower Bucks Hospital
501 Bath Road
Bristol, PA 19007
215-785-9200

