

James Farm Ecological Preserve

The Gift of a Treasure of Field, Forest and Beach on Cedar Neck in Ocean View Delaware

Life-long coastal Sussex resident Mary Lighthipe had a truly prophetic vision of the Cedar Neck area, just north of Ocean View. Could she have imagined the resort development that would come to Cedar Neck, and how the gift of the James Farm to Sussex County would preserve an oasis of open space that would become more precious with each passing year?

In 1998 this vision became reality for Sussex Countians and visitors alike; a place where they could relax, learn and play. On sandy beaches, along wooded trails, lush green meadows and lively bay waters, an estimated 10,000+ human visitors, (and countless four-legged friends) visit the James Farm Ecological Preserve each year.

The 150 acre property, located on Cedar Neck Road just north of Ocean View, is owned by Sussex County by virtue of a bequest of deed by Mrs. Lighthipe in 1992. The property has been managed by the Delaware Center for the Inland Bays since 1998. Living up to the Center's mission of "Restore, Research, Educate", the property has been used to study oysters, horseshoe crabs, shorebirds, shoreline erosion, saltmarsh hydrology, and more..

Mixed hardwood and pine forests have succeeded fallow farm fields and fresh water wetlands and upland meadows have been created, creating a diverse habitat for many types of animals. Each year, nearly a thousand 7th and 8th grade students from the Indian River School District spend the day immersed in watershed education for a "hands on, waders on" day at the Preserve.

By far, the most popular destination at the Farm is the beach on Pasture Point Cove. It's a great place to clam and crab, and has a gentle slope perfect for small children to enjoy the water without heavy surf. The walk to the beach is about a quarter-mile through wildflower meadow, hardwood succession forest, mixed maritime forest and saltmarsh. All year around, it is a great place to see many types of shorebirds, songbirds and birds of prey. The other trails, less traveled, meander through woods and meadows; turkey, deer and fox are not an uncommon sight. Several overlook platforms offer beautiful views of salt marshes and the Indian River Bay; look for herons, osprey and egret.

If you go to the James Farm, there are some rules to remember. It is open dawn-to-dusk, 365 days a year. Dogs are welcome but must be leashed, and please cleanup after them; there is a dog cleanup station by the parking lot. Glass bottles are prohibited, and the facility is carry-in/carry-out (take your trash with you). Also keep in mind that biting insects and ticks can be prevalent at certain times of the year.

The Center is continuing pursuit of Mrs. Lighthipe's vision. In 2014, a master plan was created to plan for growth of the James Farm while protecting its unique wild flavor. In the future, look for upgrades to some of the preserve's physical plan,t but don't expect the farm to change too much. It will continue to be a place that students can seine for silversides, citizen/scientists count horseshoe crabs and ospreys rule the skies.