



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Ring in the new year with a First Day Hike at an Illinois state park

SPRINGFIELD – The Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) invites residents to step into 2026 with a First Day Hike at an Illinois state park on New Year's Day.

IDNR is hosting self-guided hikes at 17 state parks across Illinois on Jan. 1. These free, family-friendly hikes are available to the public.

The [First Day Hike](#) program is an initiative in partnership with [America's State Parks Foundation](#). The organization began the event in 1992 in Massachusetts. The campaign encourages participants nationwide to hike, bike and engage in activities in state parks on the first day of the new year.

This year, the program is highlighting America's 250th anniversary in 2026 and the outdoor places that have shaped the country's past and present.

"IDNR invites Illinoisans everywhere to take time on Jan. 1 to explore our beautiful state parks and consider what conservation and public lands may look like in the future," **said IDNR Director Natalie Phelps Finnie**. "There's no better way to clear your mind after the holidays and look ahead to a new year than to explore the outdoors."

The following Illinois state parks will have stickers and special photo opportunities for hikers. Visitors are encouraged to sign in and share photos and videos on social media with the hashtag **#ILFirstDayHikes**.

- Beall Woods State Park, Wabash County
- Beaver Dam State Park, Macoupin County
- Castle Rock State Park, Ogle County
- Eagle Creek and Wolf Creek state parks, Shelby County
- Eldon Hazlet State Recreation Area, Clinton County
- Fox Ridge State Park, Coles County
- Giant City State Park, Jackson County
- Illinois Beach State Park, Lake County
- Lincoln Trail State Park, Clark County
- Lincoln's New Salem State Historic Site, Menard County
- Pere Marquette State Park, Jersey County
- Rock Island Trail State Park, Stark County
- Sand Ridge State Forest, Mason County
- Sangchris Lake State Park, Sangamon County
- Starved Rock State Park, LaSalle County
- Volo Bog State Natural Area, Lake County

Illinois does not charge admission to state parks, historic sites and other locations. For more information, visit <https://dnr.illinois.gov/parks.html>.

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About IDNR

The Illinois Department of Natural Resources is celebrating 100 years of conservation and service to the people of Illinois throughout 2025. The department was established July 1, 1925, as the Illinois Department of Conservation, bringing under one umbrella oversight of fish and game, forestry, public works, and lakes.

Today, IDNR's work encompasses management of about 400 sites across Illinois, including state parks and historic sites; wildlife, fisheries, forestry, and natural heritage; Lake Michigan water allocation and coastal management; conservation police; mines and minerals; oil and gas; issuance of licenses, permits, and numerous grants; the World Shooting and Recreational Complex in Sparta; and the Illinois State Museum. Visit <https://dnr.illinois.gov> for more information.