

Hiking events offered over holiday weekend

By DYLAN MILLER
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There are numerous ways to start the new year, why not start it with an adventure? This is what many residents across the state will be doing as guided hiking groups take to the forests despite the cold weather.

The hikes are part of America's State Parks First Day Hikes initiative, which was organized by the National Association of State Park directors to promote both healthy lifestyles throughout the year and year-round recreation at state parks. According to a press release from the state Parks and Forests Foundation, all 50 state park systems sponsor First Day Hikes.

Huntingdon County's First Day Hike will be held at

Greenwood Furnace State Park on the ever-popular Standing Stone Trail (SST).

George Conrad III, vice president and Spokesperson for the SST Hiking Club explained that Greenwood Furnace State Park manager Mike Dinsmore will lead hikers from the parking lot across from the visitor's center to Monsell Trail, hook up with Lorence trail before climbing to the top of the ridge on Turkey Trail.

"This particular hike allows participants to see the work that SST club does," said Conrad. "We added Lorence Trail as a courtesy to the state park to form a nice five-mile loop for hikers who want a little

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more of a challenge but don't want an overnight trip."

If last year's participation is any indication of this year, the trail will see a great deal of traffic.

"Last year, Mike and I promoted and advertised the hike, and when I got here, the parking lot was filled and we had 85 people joining us for the hike," said Conrad. "There were elderly, children, a huge variety of people."

In order to ensure the safety of all hikers, Conrad explained that there was some organization that needed to happen.

"It was definitely tough to keep track of everyone, but they assigned a person to be a tail guide in the front, and a sweeper in the back who went as slow as the slowest person to make sure nobody fell behind," he said.

Conrad stressed that the hike is an event that promotes camaraderie, and it's by no means competitive and everyone can go at their own pace.

Before the First Day Hikes begin, there is a Last Day Hike tomorrow, Saturday, Dec. 31, at the Peace Chapel area in Huntingdon, guided by the Juniata Valley Audubon Society.

"The Peace Chapel Trail system in Huntingdon is a hidden jewel above our town," said Kristin Joivell,

coordinator. "Since it's part of the 170-acre Baker-Henry Nature Preserve, visitors can enjoy fields, forests and creeks all in one area through an easily accessible trail system. Winter highlights include beech trees (some with bear claw markings), Christmas ferns, holly bushes and winter birds."

Joivell explained that this will be the second year for the event and is inspired by the First Day Hikes.

"Last year's hike was attended by about 15 people of all ages, including three

ents," she said. "I hope to have just as many or more people join us for the event this year."

By hiking with a group, participants will have the opportunity to learn about the landscape they are traveling through at a relaxed pace.

"In group hikes, you can really experience nature in unique ways since everyone has their own area of interest," said Joivell. "The JV Audubon Society often has members who attend events who are experts in birds,

wildflowers, so you can learn a lot about the natural world from others on these hikes. I highly encourage everyone to come out and enjoy the last day of 2016 with us."

The Last Day Hike will begin at 11 a.m. Saturday, Dec. 31, at Detwiler Memorial Field and end at 1:30 p.m.

The First Day Hike will begin at noon Sunday, Jan. 1, at the Greenwood Furnace State Park Visitor's Center and will end at 3 p.m.

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Photo by DYLAN MILLER

As part of the First Day Hike tradition, Mike Dinsmore, Greenwood Furnace State Park Manager will lead a 5-mile hike at the state park that will incorporate the Standing Stone Trail.