

The People's Park Project Brings Children to Hunting Island

Written by Editor

Monday, 15 February 2021 08:43 - Last Updated Wednesday, 17 February 2021 07:02



For several years, Friends of Hunting Island members have been working on a way to “pay our privilege forward,” by bringing more underserved children to the state park. Covid-19 delayed the launch of the project, but now, with support from the Coastal Communities Foundation, Friends of Hunting Island will begin by bringing families to Hunting Island State Park through The People's Park Project.

Many children in the Lowcountry have never seen the ocean, even though it's in our back yard. Educators have noted that underserved children have a more limited vocabulary than their middle-class peers when they enter school, in part because they have had fewer life experiences. Going to the beach is one of those important childhood experiences.

Out of financial necessity, Hunting Island State Park began charging entry fees in 1982, which made it prohibitive for many families to visit the park. After over thirty years of free entry, the number of people who could easily visit the park diminished significantly. Nevertheless, today Hunting Island is the number one most-visited park in South Carolina.

Hunting Island State Park and Friends of Hunting Island have supported the Discover Carolina program for many years. This state-created program is curriculum based, so that students can learn science, history, or sociology through a park-based experience in an outdoor classroom. Rangers are trained to teach on the subjects pertinent to their park. At Hunting Island, students in 3rd, 5th, and 7th grades learn about sea turtles, salt marsh ecology, and barrier island ecology.

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The People's Park Project is intended to reach students in other ways, by bringing pre-school and younger classes, families, and organizations to the park for a day of fun and learning. Many studies have shown how important it is for children to engage with nature. Time in the outdoors enhances their intellectual, social, emotional, and physical development. By getting children of all ages out to the park, we may be able to raise their level of environmental stewardship—a benefit to everyone.

There is no more inspiring moment than to witness a child's first view of the beauty and power of the ocean. Volunteers in the People's Park Project will have that opportunity. To find out more about the project, go to www.friendsofhuntingisland.org or contact the project team at FOHI PeoplesPark@gmail.com