

= Presque Isle State Park =

Presque Isle State Park / ˈprɛʃk.ə?l / is a 3 000 acre (1 259 ha) Pennsylvania state park on an arching , sandy peninsula that juts into Lake Erie , 4 miles (6 km) west of the city of Erie , in Millcreek Township , Erie County , Pennsylvania , in the United States . The peninsula sweeps northeastward , surrounding Presque Isle Bay along the park 's southern coast . It has 13 miles (21 km) of roads , 21 miles (34 km) of recreational trails , 13 beaches for swimming , and a marina . Popular activities at the park include swimming , boating , hiking , biking , and birdwatching .

The recorded history of Presque Isle begins with the Erielhonan , a Native American tribe who gave their name to Lake Erie , and includes French , British , and American forts , as well as serving as a base for Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry 's fleet in the War of 1812 . With the growing importance of shipping on Lake Erie in the 19th century , Presque Isle became home to several lighthouses and what became a United States Coast Guard station . In 1921 it became a state park , and as of 2007 it hosts over 4 million visitors per year , the most of any Pennsylvania state park .

The Presque Isle peninsula formed on a moraine from the end of the Wisconsin glaciation and is constantly being reshaped by waves and wind . This leads to seven ecological zones within the park , which provide a classic example of ecological succession . A National Natural Landmark since 1967 , the park has been named one of the best places in the United States for watching birds , particularly in the Gull Point Natural Area . The Tom Ridge Environmental Center at the entrance to the park allows visitors to learn more about the park and its ecology . Presque Isle State Park has been chosen by the Pennsylvania Bureau of Parks for its list of " 25 Must See Pennsylvania State Parks " .

= = History = =

= = = Early inhabitants = = =

Presque Isle was formed at the end of the Wisconsin glaciation about 11 000 years ago . The earliest known inhabitants of the southern Lake Erie coast were the Erielhonan , also known as the " Eriez " , an Iroquoian speaking tribe of Native Americans . Erielhonan meant the " Cat " or " Raccoon " people , and the name " Erie " , a corruption of Erielhonan , became the name of the lake and county in which Presque Isle Park is found and of the city nearest the park .

An Erielhonan legend taught that the Great Spirit led them to Presque Isle because of the wealth of game , the abundance of clean fresh water , and the cool breezes " coming from the land of snow and ice " (i.e. Canada) . Another legend explains how the Erielhonan ventured into Lake Erie in search of the land where the sun set , but the spirit of the lake blew a fierce storm to keep them from finding it . To protect the Erielhonan from the storm , their god laid his outstretched arm into the lake , giving them safety during the storm . The god 's arm remained in the lake , protecting the tribe 's future generations .

The Erielhonan are believed to have lived and farmed on the peninsula . They fought several wars , the last starting in 1653 with the Five Nations of the Iroquois . Despite initial victories over the Senecas , in 1654 the Erielhonan their largest village , Rique (at the modern city of Erie) , was destroyed by 1 800 Iroquois warriors . By 1656 the Erielhonan were destroyed as a people , although the Iroquois adopted survivors who were absorbed primarily into the Senecas .

= = = Forts , settlers , and War of 1812 = = =

The French first named the peninsula in the 1720s ; presque -isle means peninsula (lit . " almost an island ") in French . They built Fort Presque Isle at the modern city of Erie in the summer of 1753 , naming it for the peninsula that protected the fort . The French also built two " military outposts " on Presque Isle itself : one at the entrance to the peninsula and one at the eastern point .

During the French and Indian War , the French abandoned their outposts and burned their fort in 1759 . The British constructed a new fort of the same name that year , which later fell to Native American forces on June 19 , 1763 , during Pontiac 's Rebellion .

Presque Isle passed from British to American control after the American Revolutionary War , and the Iroquois sold their rights to the land containing the peninsula to the United States at the second Treaty of Fort Stanwix in 1784 . Pennsylvania did not acquire an undisputed title to the land until it purchased the Erie Triangle from the Federal government on April 3 , 1792 . In 1795 General Anthony Wayne built a new , American " Fort Presque Isle " , and on April 18 of that year the town of " Presqu ' Ile " , since renamed Erie , was laid out near it . Wayne died at the fort on December 15 , 1796 , and was originally buried there .

Erie County was formed from Allegheny County on March 12 , 1800 . Millcreek Township , which initially contained both the Presque Isle peninsula and village of Erie , was one of the original townships . Erie was named the county seat in 1803 , incorporated as a borough in 1805 , and became a city in 1851 .

During the War of 1812 , Presque Isle played a part in the victory over the British in the Battle of Lake Erie . Oliver Hazard Perry , commander of the American fleet , made strategic use of the bay to as a place to construct six of the nine ships in his fleet . Using this location protected the men by creating an obstacle , forcing potential attackers to circumnavigate the peninsula to reach them .

The " Little Bay " near the tip of the peninsula where the ships sheltered , next to the current Perry 's Monument , was later named " Misery Bay " because of the hardships during the winter of 1813 ? 1814 , after the men returned there from battle . Many men suffered from smallpox and were kept in quarantine near the bay . A great many infected men died and were buried in what is now called Graveyard Pond .

After the Battle of Lake Erie on September 10 , 1813 , Perry 's two largest ships were badly damaged , and the US Brig Lawrence was intentionally sunk in Misery Bay . The Lawrence was raised in 1875 but was burned while on display at the 1876 Centennial Exposition . The US Brig Niagara was initially repaired , then sunk for preservation in 1820 and raised in 1913 , and parts of it were eventually used in the current Niagara , based across Presque Isle Bay in Erie .

= = = Lighthouses and Coast Guard = = =

The Presque Isle peninsula forms Presque Isle Bay , which serves as a natural harbor for Erie . During the 19th century , as Lake Erie navigation grew more important , shipping aids were built on Presque Isle . As of 2007 , two main lighthouses can be found in the park . The Erie Harbor North Pier Light began as a wooden tower , erected in 1830 . In 1858 , a stronger steel structure was brought from France and installed at Erie to replace the wooden beacon , which had been damaged by a schooner . This light still stands at the far eastern side of the park , near the inlet between the lake and the bay .

The Presque Isle Light was constructed in 1872 on the north side of Presque Isle and was lit on July 12 , 1873 . This light is 74 @-@ foot @-@ tall (23 m) , with a red brick house that was used as a lighthouse keeper residence , and later a park residence . Today the lighthouse is maintained by the United States Coast Guard and flashes a white light to warn ships of the sandy peninsula that juts into Lake Erie . The light station is open to public tours from Memorial Day through Labor Day on weekends , weather permitting (see presqueislelighthouse.org) . A third , smaller lighthouse was built in 1906 by the Erie Waterworks on the Presque Isle Bay side of the peninsula . Today it stands in the ferry landing for the Presque Isle Water Taxi service , south of the former waterworks along the state park 's multi @-@ purpose trail on the southeast side of Presque Isle .

United States Life @-@ Saving Service District 9 opened a life @-@ saving station at Presque Isle in 1876 . William Clark was the keeper from 1877 until he drowned in 1891 . He was succeeded by Andrew Jansen , who was the keeper until 1914 . When the Life @-@ Saving Service and the Revenue Cutter Service merged in 1915 to become the United States Coast Guard , LSS Presque Isle , also called the Erie life @-@ saving station , became Coast Guard Station # 236 . The station , still in operation , is assigned to the Ninth District of the United States Coast Guard .

= = = Modern era and state park = = =

In 1908 , Erie started building a waterworks on Presque Isle to provide fresh water for the city . Water from Lake Erie was pumped into two reservoirs on the peninsula , where particulates in the water were allowed to settle , removing them from the lake water . After treatment , the water flowed into the waterlines of the city . In 1917 a pumphouse powered by a steam boiler and engine was built : this pumped the water from one basin into the other , then across Presque Isle Bay to Erie . This system of supplying drinking water for Erie operated until 1949 . The pumphouse is now used for zebra mussel control and as a concession stand for bicycle and quadracycle @-@ rentals within the state park .

As Pennsylvania 's only surf beach , the Presque Isle beaches were already a popular attraction when the state legislature authorized the creation of the " Pennsylvania State Park at Erie " in May 1921 . Oversight was given to the new " State Park and Harbor Commission of Erie " , including local representation , instead of to the state Department of Forests and Waters . Presque Isle quickly became the most popular state park in Pennsylvania . Presque Isle was an early example of locating state parks near cities , a trend that would become prevalent statewide only in the 1960s .

The first paved road was built in the park in 1924 , and today 13 miles (21 km) of roads run through the park . Pennsylvania Route 832 is the main road into the park , and is subsequently known as Peninsula Drive . Presque Isle has been referred to as " Peninsula State Park " . The Perry Monument in the park was constructed in 1926 near Misery Bay and the burials in Graveyard Pond .

By 1937 official state publications were referring to the park as " Presque Isle State Park " , and that same year it led the state park system with 1 @. @ 4 million visitors . In the 1950s the peninsula was enlarged to accommodate new roads and parking , using 3 million square yards (2 @, @ 500 @, @ 000 m2) of sand dredged from the interior of the peninsula . The resulting basin became the current marina . Other new facilities included three modern bath houses built in 1957 . That same year Gull Point (at the eastern end of the peninsula) was named a nature preserve by the state .

Presque Isle was named a National Natural Landmark by the National Park Service in 1967 . A recommendation was made to abolish the independent board as early as 1930 , although this did not come about until January 19 , 1971 , with the creation of the state Department of Environmental Resources (which later became the DCNR) . From 1989 to 1992 , over 50 breakwaters were built along the western and northern shore of the peninsula to help control erosion . In 1997 the park 's Important Bird Area (IBA) was one of the first 73 IBAs established in Pennsylvania . As part of the State Parks 2000 strategic plan of the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) , Gull Point was named a " State Park Natural Area for rare and migratory shorebirds to rest , feed and possibly nest " .

The Tom Ridge Environmental Center at the entrance to the park opened in May 2006 . As of 2007 , the Pennsylvania DCNR Bureau of Parks , which administers all 120 Pennsylvania state parks , had chosen Presque Isle for its " 25 Must @-@ See Pennsylvania State Parks " list , citing its status as Pennsylvania 's only surf beach , its status as a National Natural Landmark , and its " geological and biological diversity and its historic significance " . Scenes for the film The Road were shot at Presque Isle in April 2008 , with Beach 10 used as a seashore .

A weak tornado touched down in the state park on June 27 , 2010 . Rated an EF0 on the Enhanced Fujita Scale , it downed power lines and trees near the Stull Interpretive Center , and also damaged a nearby observation platform . Presque Isle was closed on June 28 to facilitate clean @-@ up of the debris and reopened the next morning .

During Hurricane Sandy in October 2012 , parts and remnants of the storm reached Presque Isle . The park was closed in preparation of the storm and waves for 14 ? 18 feet were called for , along with high winds . The storm was expected to be severe , but luckily was not . Only 8 foot waves were recorded and not as high of winds either . The park made it out with only minor flooding , a few downed trees , and the loss of power at the park marina .

= = Geology and climate = =

Presque Isle is a recurved , sand spit that formed during the last glacial period , or ice age , when the Laurentide Ice Sheet advanced into the basin now occupied by Lake Erie , and , when it retreated to the north between 12 @, @ 370 BC and 12 @, @ 790 BC , left behind a moraine consisting of clay , sand , and gravel that initially formed the Presque Isle peninsula . The deposits are constantly being re @-@ worked by wave action and are gradually migrating to the northeast due to longshore drift .

The French term *presqu 'île* , the origin of the park 's name , means " peninsula " , or , literally , " almost an island " . Despite the name , Presque Isle has been an island for brief periods of time after it has been cut off from the mainland several times since 1819 ? the longest stretch was from 1832 to 1864 . In the 1950s to combat erosion , the state and federal governments built sets of concrete seawalls and perpendicular groins . In 1992 , a series of 58 breakwaters were also constructed to have capture sand and significantly slowed its movement eastward . Even with the substantial engineering projects , sand has to be relocated from tombolos that form behind the breakwaters , and new sand has to be brought in annually to replenish the beaches .

Presque Isle protects the natural Presque Isle Bay , which creates a deep and wide harbor for the city of Erie . The bay is often filled with pleasure craft as well as cargo ships from all over the world that use the Great Lakes shipping port . Erie became an international port after the opening of the Saint Lawrence Seaway in 1959 .

Owing to the parks location relative to Erie , its climate is similar to that of the city . Erie and the peninsula are located in a snow belt that stretches from Cleveland to Syracuse and Watertown ; accordingly , its winters are typically cold , with heavy lake @-@ effect snow , but also with occasional stretches of mild weather that cause accumulated snow to melt . The Erie region lies in the humid continental zone (Köppen Dfa) . Presque Isle 's lakeside location helps to temper summer heat , with an average of only 3 @. @ 8 days of 90 ° F (32 ° C) + highs annually , and the highest temperature ever recorded was 100 ° F (38 ° C) on June 25 , 1988 ; there is an average of 2 @. @ 5 days with lows of 0 ° F (? 18 ° C) or colder annually , and the lowest temperature ever recorded was ? 18 ° F (? 28 ° C) on January 19 , 1994 and February 16 , 2015 . Ice dunes typically form along the beaches in the winter from snowfall and frozen spray , and normally reach a height over 6 feet (1 @. @ 8 m) . The dunes protect the beaches from erosion during winter storms , and continue growing until the surface of Lake Erie freezes in the winter .

= = Flora , fauna , and habitat = =

= = = Ecological zones and succession = = =

According to the DCNR , because it has so " many unique habitats , Presque Isle contains a greater number of the state 's endangered , threatened and rare species than any other area of comparable size in Pennsylvania . " The DCNR recognizes seven different ecological zones within Presque Isle State Park , each with a different plant and animal community . These zones are : Lake Erie ; the beaches and shoreline ; sandy plain and ponds ; sand dunes and ridges ; marshes and old ponds ; heath and sub @-@ climax forest ; and the climax forest . Lake Erie , which surrounds the park , is the first zone and is home to 80 species of fish and at least six species of crustaceans .

The remaining ecological zones , with their progression from shoreline to climax forest , are a classic illustration of the concept of ecological succession . Much of this progression is due to the changing nature of Presque Isle and its shifting shoreline and dunes . The shoreline , the second zone , is formed by wave action and is in equilibrium between erosion and deposition , with the initial plants stabilizing the sand of the new shoreline . The newly formed sandy plain and the ponds formed in it are the third zone . The ponds start as trapped pockets of lake water and can erode away or be filled by wind @-@ blown sand or drifting dunes . The new ponds provide habitat for plants and animals : for example , the state park is home to 89 species of Odonata (dragonflies and

damselflies) and Lepidoptera , including 35 different butterflies , as well as 84 different sorts of spiders .

Sand dunes and ridges are the fourth zone , formed when beach sand transported by wind and waves becomes trapped by vegetation . Dunes grow and are stabilized by grasses , followed by other types of vegetation . This provides habitat for amphibians , birds , mammals , and reptiles . Old dunes can become more permanent ridges , which shelter ponds . These dunes , ridges , and ponds are often remnants of previous shorelines ; at the Presque Isle State Park " Long Pond " just east of the marina , dunes and ridges mark the eastern shoreline from 1862 . The fifth ecological zone consists of old ponds and marshes . Ponds protected by dunes and ridges are more stable ; these old ponds support more plant and animal life , and as they fill with vegetation , they become marshes . Old ponds and marshes have high biodiversity . Nearly 400 species of terrestrial vertebrates live on Presque Isle , including 318 different birds , 48 kinds of mammals , 13 types of amphibians , and 19 reptile species .

The sixth and seventh ecological zones are characterized by their shrubs and trees , and Presque Isle State Park is home to 633 plant species (195 monocotyledons , 410 dicotyledons , 5 gymnosperms , 5 horsetails , 13 ferns , and 5 mosses) . The sixth zone , thicket and sub @-@ climax forest , forms when shrubs grow on dying marshes , followed by small trees . The trees shade and thin out the thickets of shrubs , leading to a sub @-@ climax forest . The seventh and final stage is climax forest , where many large trees form a canopy . If left undisturbed , this ecological succession is believed to take between 500 and 600 years , although visitors to parts of Presque Isle State Park can walk through all of these zones in 5 miles (8 km) .

The Pennsylvania Audubon Society has listed the park as Pennsylvania Important Bird Area (IBA) # 1 , and it considered one of the best birdwatching sites on Pennsylvania . The diversity of habitats on the peninsula makes it an ideal home for over 320 species of birds . (For comparison , the United States has about 925 bird species .) Forty @-@ five of the bird species found in the park are listed as " endangered " or " threatened " , including the piping plover , cerulean warbler , rusty blackbird and saltmarsh sharp @-@ tailed sparrow . Waterfowl and wading birds live at Presque Isle year round . Four species of gull and three species of tern can be seen at Gull Point during the summer months . The majority of collection during the annual Christmas Bird Count , which has been held in Erie County since 1956 , is garnered from observations made by volunteers within the park . Many different species of plants and animals can also be found at Presque Isle State Park due to the wide variety of ecological zones .

= = = Gull Point Natural Area = = =

Human beings have played a role in the ecology of Presque Isle since at least the Erielhonian . The natural drift of sand is hindered or stopped by breakwaters , permanent structures , and roads . Roads also do not absorb rainwater , causing erosion , and break up natural habitats . Excavations such as those to make the waterworks basins or the marina have destroyed habitats , but yearly artificial replenishment with sand helps to create new ones . One area within the park is closed to all public use from April to November to minimize the impact of humans : it is the easternmost part of the park , Gull Point .

Gull Point at Presque Isle State Park has been set aside as a Pennsylvania " State Park Natural Area " . These areas provide locations for scientific observation of natural systems ; they protect examples of natural interest and beauty as well as examples of unique and typical animal and plant habitats .

Gull Point covers 319 acres (129 ha) , of which 67 acres (27 ha) form the Natural Area and are closed to park visitors during the height of the bird migrations . The natural area is a safe haven and resting spot for migrating and nesting birds . Many of the species of birds that rest at Gull Point are not seen anywhere else in Pennsylvania . Presque Isle lies on the Atlantic Flyway , a major migratory path , and some of these birds migrate from as far north as the Arctic Circle to South America . They pass through in November on their long flights south and return in April on their flights north .

Erosion and deposition of sand , which has formed Gull Point , continues to change it . From May 1991 to October 2006 , Gull Point lost a total of 4 @. @ 6 acres (1 @. @ 9 ha) , and if this trend continues , it may become an island . After the breakwaters were constructed in 1992 , less sand was added to replenish the beaches . Federal funding of sand replenishment has been cut off since 2005 , leading to further reduction in sand added to the peninsula . Without new sand , erosion has reduced the northern beaches of Gull Point , even while regions to the east and south have continued to grow at a slower rate , for a net yearly loss of 0 @. @ 4 acres (0 @. @ 2 ha) .

= = Tom Ridge Environmental Center = =

The Tom Ridge Environmental Center (TREC) is the gateway to and administrative center for Presque Isle State Park , as well as housing interactive educational exhibits , a " Discovery Center " , classrooms , and research laboratories . The Center , which officially opened on May 26 , 2006 , is on 12 acres (5 ha) just off Route 832 on a bluff overlooking Lake Erie . TREC is named for former Pennsylvania Governor Tom Ridge , " who grew up in Erie , worked at the park as a young man and provided funding for the center and numerous Presque Isle projects during his administration . "

Construction on the center began in 2002 , although the idea for such a center at Presque Isle was some 50 years old . The Presque Isle State Park headquarters began operating from TREC in 2005 , and it is also home to offices for the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection 's Great Lakes and Coastal Zone Management programs , the DCNR Recreation and Conservation program , as well as Presque Isle Audubon , Lake @- @ Erie Allegheny Earth Force , Pennsylvania Sea Grant , Presque Isle Partnership , and the Purple Martin Conservation Association . The Regional Science Consortium , " a collaborative , non @- @ profit organization that focuses on and coordinates educational and research projects for Lake Erie and the upper Ohio River Basin " , was organized in 2002 and is based at TREC . Its 32 member organizations include schools , school districts , colleges , universities , museums , state agencies , conservation groups , and private corporations from Pennsylvania , Ohio , and Ontario .

Facilities at the 65 @, @ 000 @- @ square @- @ foot (6 @, @ 000 m2) Tom Ridge Environmental Center include eight research laboratories (including several large aquariums) for the RSC , several classrooms , a " Discovery Center " for younger students to explore science hands @- @ on , interpretive exhibits highlighting local and regional flora and fauna , as well as the human history and culture of the area . The center also offers a large @- @ format movie theater , a smaller theater , gift shop , cafeteria , and a 75 @- @ foot (23 m) tall observation tower that overlooks Lake Erie . The center was constructed as a " green " building and has received a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) rating from the United States Green Building Council . Besides supporting environmental research and education , the center is meant to " increase off @- @ season use " of the state park .

= = Recreation = =

In addition to the facilities at TREC , Presque Isle State Park provides opportunities for daytime recreational activity along the Lake Erie and Presque Isle Bay coastlines , as well as on its inland trails and lagoons . Boating , canoeing , fishing , and water skiing are common summer sports , while hiking , biking , inline skating , and bird watching are some of the inland activities . Ice fishing , ice boating , ice skating , and cross @- @ country skiing occupy winter visitors . Two of the beaches feature volleyball courts ; Beach 6 has 6 courts and Beach 11 has one . No admission fee is charged for the park or TREC .

Boats of nearly any variety are permitted on Lake Erie at Presque Isle State Park . Boats with internal combustion engines are prohibited in the interior lagoons , except for Grave Yard Pond , where a concession rents motor and pontoon boats , canoes , and kayaks for recreational use . The park also has a 500 @- @ slip marina , open to boats up to 42 @- @ foot @- @ long (13 m) , and five boat launches . Boat tours provide views of the park , lake , bay , and Erie skyline . All boats must have a current registration from any state . Water conditions on Lake Erie can change with little

notice , and boaters are asked to use caution .

Water skiing and scuba diving are permitted at Presque Isle State Park in designated waters of Lake Erie . Water skiing must take place in Presque Isle Bay or out on Lake Erie and is prohibited within 500 feet (150 m) of the shore . Scuba divers must be certified and are required to register at the park office to obtain information on the waters that are open to diving .

Presque Isle State Park has two distinct fishing zones . Lake Erie is home to perch , trout , walleye , bass , and steelhead . Presque Isle Bay is the home of muskellunge , northern pike , crappie , smelt , as well as other fish that swim in from the lake . Trout fishing is also allowed in the two waterworks basins , which are stocked by the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission . Hunting is prohibited at Presque Isle State Park with the exception of controlled duck and goose hunting seasons in designated blinds .

Presque Isle State Park , which has 13 beaches , is home to the only surf swimming in Pennsylvania . Beaches are open from Memorial Day to Labor Day with swimming permitted when lifeguards are on duty from 10 : 00 EDT to 20 : 00 EDT . Extensive picnic facilities are available at most of the swimming areas .

= = Nearby state parks = =

The following state parks are within 30 miles (48 km) of Presque Isle State Park :

Erie Bluffs State Park (Erie County)