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OCEAN COUNTY

‘Pissed off’ fishermen lose Jersey Shore beach access to bennies. Now they’re devastated and raising hell.

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By **Steven Rodas | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com**

Richard Blosscock knows his days are numbered as he steps onto the sugar sand.

The serenity of Island Beach State Park is where his father taught him how to surf fish when he was a boy. Years later, he brought his own sons here to teach the next generation of Blosscock men how to cast a line far into the surf.

“There isn’t a spot I can see where I don’t have memories,” Blosscock, 55, says as waves lap onto his black wader boots on a frigid December morning.

But Blosscock won’t make new memories here next year thanks to a controversial state decision that will destroy his access, he says. And he knows exactly what his late father, Richard Blosscock Sr., would say about New Jersey allowing out-of-state anglers to take his place.

“Bulls---,” Blosscock says, imitating a gruff inflection.

Blosscock, a Princeton resident who grew up in Lakehurst, is one of the 3,609 losers in a new state lottery for parking permits that are essential to surf fish at the secluded beach. Denial of a small sticker has ignited a massive uproar that underscores just how special fishing holes are for New Jerseyans — and just how angry they get when one is ripped away.

Beach access is now the source of curse-filled tirades lobbed at out-of-state fishermen. Lengthy social media rants from heartbroken anglers. Accusations that “bennies” are showing up just to party on hallowed fishing grounds, stealing access to land that many New Jerseyans see as a key to their way of life.

“It’s like losing a little piece of heaven,” said Mark Dzindzio, 70, who had received a permit for 47 years until now.



Fisherman Richard Blosscock looks at old family fishing pictures on the beach in Island Beach State Park on Friday, December 5, 2025. Pictured: One of Blosscock's sons with his grandfather, Richard Sr. or "Pop Pop." Jim Lowney | For NJ Advance Media

Parking proximity is everything in surf fishing, which requires long rods, heavy weights, lures and special rigs used for moving water. Anglers park on the beach and target areas where fish are feeding, often moving at a moment's notice.

The state previously used a first-come, first-serve system to award the 8,000 available permits, which cost \$195 for residents and \$225 for out-of-staters.

That worked fine for many like Blosscock, who makes dozens of trips a year in his black Toyota Tundra, unloading his equipment just a short walk from the water. He had secured a permit annually for almost a quarter century.

But competition for the permits has grown exponentially. They sold out for the first time in 2021, and demand has continued soaring since then. New Jersey introduced a new random lottery system for 2026 that was supposed to be more fair, officials said.

“We’re trying to keep this as equitable as possible, give everybody a chance,” said John Cecil, Department of Environmental Protection assistant commissioner of state parks, forests and historic sites.

Instead, the results have been devastating, said Dzindzio, president of the New Jersey Beach Buggy Association, an 800-member beach preservation group that includes many surf fishers.

About 900 out-of-state residents, roughly the same number as recent years, won permits in the online lottery, according to the state. But the major difference for 2026 is that many New Jerseyans who made a point to get their permits early in the first-come, first-serve process came up empty.

It’s possible some permits could go unclaimed and be won in a subsequent lottery. Otherwise, the state has offered no solution, infuriating those who were rejected.

“It is our beach,” Dzindzio said. “And the people that run it are there to run it for us.”

No fishing policy change in the past 50 years has stoked so much outrage, said John Bushell Jr. who owns Betty & Nick’s Bait & Tackle, a popular shop in Seaside Park.

“People that have been fishing down there for decades are severely pissed off,” he said.



Surging demand

It all started with a little sticker.

New Jerseyans loved fishing at Island Beach State Park long before the state purchased the land in 1953. But anglers had to obtain a parking pass from the mayor of what was then Island Beach Borough.

The state bought the land and continued issuing the permits, often decorating the colorful rectangular sticker with a fish or a sea creature.

The system ran smoothly for decades.

Until COVID-19.

As the pandemic raged, New Jerseyans and their neighbors craved time outdoors. Fishing. Hiking. Birdwatching. Island Beach, a hot spot for it all, was in demand like never before. Photos and videos of excursions to the barrier island spread on social media, according to Caryn Shinske, a DEP spokesperson.

Permit applications increased from 7,900 in 2020 to over 10,000 in 2024. The state created an online system in 2021 — after the number of applicants surpassed the 8,000 cap for the first time — to try streamlining the process.

Fishing vehicle permits, given only to 4x4 or all-wheel-drive vehicles, are capped to avoid overcrowding or damage to the park's natural resources. The number has held steady at 8,000 — with the exception of extra permits issued for veterans with disabilities — even as applications grew close to 12,000 for 2026.

New Jerseyans won 7,089 of the 8,000 permits for 2026, claiming about 88%, a number similar to the prior five years.

New Jersey Annual Island Beach State Park – Fishing Vehicle Permits 2021-2026

The state's Department of Environmental Protection provides fishing vehicle permits for drivers to surf fish Island Beach State Park. In addition to year-round permits, the DEP issues weekday passes.

Year of permit use	Number of Permits Applied For	Number of Permits Issued	N.J. Permits Issued	Out of State Permits Issued
2021	7,912	7,912	6,933	979
2022	8,096	8,096	7,136	960
2023	8,106	8,106	7,200	906
2024	8,408	8,408	7,468	940
2025	10,298	8,440	7,515	925
2026	11,609	(still being issued)	6,885*	(still being issued)

*Beginning in 2022, the annual permit totals for New Jersey residents also include permits issued to disabled veterans. These permits are not counted toward the 8,000-permit cap for annual permits. (*The number of 2026 permits issued is as of Dec. 9, 2025)*
Table: NJ Advance Media • Source: NJDEP data provided to NJ Advance Media • [Get the data](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

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But that’s little solace for those like Jonas Garcia, 58, who has been visiting Island Beach State Park’s beach for 50 years and won’t be able to fish there next year.

Garcia, of Toms River, loves the nightly beach bonfires after a day of fishing with his son and friends. Driving his silver Toyota FJ Cruiser past the beachgrass and onto the sand instantly feels like being transported.

“It’s kind of like you’re in a whole other world,” Garcia says.

Losing the permit is “very depressing,” says Dzindzio, who had held a pass for nearly a half century before being rejected for 2026. And it’s an especially hard pill to swallow given residents from Oregon, South Carolina, Montana, Maine and 20 other states received new permits.

Some out-of-state lottery winners might also have a residence in New Jersey. But that’s irrelevant to locals who see Island Beach State Park as a haven that’s being stolen.

“It’s our second home,” Dzindzio says, exasperated. “A lot of guys have their ashes spread there.”



Fisherman Richard Bluschock casts his line into the surf while fishing on the beach in Island Beach State Park on Friday, December 5,, 2025. Jim Lowney | For NJ Advance Media

Rising tension

The only tension Kevin Deiter used to feel at Island Beach State Park was the heavy tug of a 35-pound striped bass unexpectedly dragging down his pole.

But the friendly vibes have dramatically shifted in recent years, the South Florida fisherman says.

“Go back to Florida, you motherf---er!” someone yelled at him recently.

It doesn’t matter that Deiter grew up in Burlington Township and has been fishing on the park beach since 1973. People see his license plate and sound off or cramp his space to send a message.

“They stand and fish right next to me. Give me dirty looks, like they’re saying you don’t belong here,” Deiter says over the phone.

Deiter understands why New Jerseyans might resent him. But they're angry at the wrong guy, he says. The bigger problem is people who get permits with no plans to fish and then show up and break park rules, he says.

Outsiders commonly buy kids' fishing rods in order to signal they're using the passes as intended, says Bushell Jr., owner of the bait and tackle shop. Then they park multiple cars in one spot just to hang out on the sand, typically drinking alcohol, which is prohibited under park rules, local anglers say.

"They buy little pieces of crap and stick them in a sand spike," Deiter says of people who exploit the permits, "and they just party all day and the police don't do anything about it."

Social media pages dedicated to fishing at Island Beach are filled with similar rants.

"Congratulations everyone," quipped one poster, who did not get a pass for 2026. "You have officially destroyed the dream of a humble, seasoned, generational talent(ed) coastal angler. I hope the Instagram shots were worth it."

New Jersey is trying to address complaints from locals left out by lottery, including those about lax enforcement, officials say. But it is struggling to find a perfect answer.

A weekday pass launched four years ago is no good for anyone who wants total access. And Island Beach State Park is bound to get even more attention given the latest debate over the passes.

The state worries returning to the first-come, first-serve in-person system would snarl traffic and negatively impact the nearby community, Cecil says. Officials are still evaluating whether a lottery is the best option for 2027 permits, says Rebecca Fitzgerald, DEP state parks administrator.

The DEP declined to comment [on proposed legislation](#) that would provide an initial 14-day window in which only New Jersey residents would be able to purchase the fishing permits. Residents who pay taxes that cover park improvements should have first priority, lawmakers who proposed the bill say.

But even if the new bill passes, it won't change the fact that any New Jerseyan not selected in the 2026 lottery has already lost out.

Salty sea air wafts in as Blosscock steps into the frosty surf near an old beach shack where he usually starts his outings.

His 2025 vehicle sticker is still valid for a few more days.

He casts his line out and grows quiet.

"December 31, I take the heat gun out," Blosscock says later in a text message. "To remove what could possibly be my last permit."



Fisherman Richard Blosscock's 2025 Mobile Sport Fishing Permits on his truck. He parked near an old beach shack while fishing at Island Beach State Park on Friday, December 5, 2025. Jim Lowney | For NJ Advance Media



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Steven Rodas is a bilingual (English/Spanish) reporter who covers all things about New Jersey's changing climate and the people who are impacted. He has reported on environmental justice, new climate...more

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