

Public access to water is easy

Municipalities of Southport-Oak Island and the State of North Carolina have teamed to provide outstanding public access to area waters.

Long ago, this state became a proponent of public access to waterways for recreational purposes. North Carolina has been a leader in providing financial assistance to local governments in their own quests to provide recreational waterfront access.

Chief among the beneficiaries of state grants for public waterway access has been the Town of Long Beach. In the early 1980s, Long Beach became a champion of public beach access when the town actually bought back all street-ends terminating at the Atlantic Ocean and on the Intracoastal Waterway.

Today, every oceanfront street-end is a public access area. Most public oceanfront access areas feature limited parking facilities, refuse disposal containers and dune crosswalks for the protection of frontal sand dunes.

A specially designed oceanfront access at 57th Place West has been built to afford access to the handicapped. The area provides wheelchair access to the beachfront and a beach platform.

On the Intracoastal Waterway side of the island, Long Beach provides access to that body of water at several points. All street-ends are publicly owned and community parks have been built at the ends of 52nd Street East, 21st Street West and 30th Street West.

Malcolm Register Park at 52nd Street East and Robin Schuster Park at 30th Street West also feature public fishing tees, built with grants from the state's Division of Marine Fisheries. Register Park is set to undergo major expansion this year and more amenities, which now include a covered picnic area, charcoal grills and benches, are expected.

Schuster Park features a covered picnic area, charcoal grills and children's playground equipment. 21st Street Community Park is also equipped to handle a family picnic.

Boating access to the Intracoastal Waterway in Long Beach is provided free at public boat launch ramps on the north end of 54th Street East and at Blue Water Point Marina at the north end of 57th Place West.

Access has also been provided at several points along Davis Canal, the third body of public water in Long Beach. The town's Scenic Walkway between 20th Street SE and 19th Place East is a pedestrian link from the wooded area of town to the beachfront, across the Davis Canal marsh. A second walkway across the Davis Canal marsh at 32nd Street SE is under construction.

A canoe trail on the Davis Canal is accessible by a public canoe launch area at 31st Street SE, next to the Long Beach Recreation Center.

Neighboring Yaupon Beach has provided oceanfront access at each of its seven publicly owned street-ends. This year, the town completed a new public park with a breathtaking view of the Elizabeth River marsh at the north end of Barbee Boulevard. This is an outstanding picnic spot and good place to relax. One of the best views on Oak Island can be found from the Barbee park.

Caswell Beach affords public access to the beachfront from a parking area located across Caswell Beach Road from the Carolina Power and Light Co. pump station.

Southport has done an outstanding job of making the Cape Fear River the focal point of the city and of providing public access to it. Riverwalk was completed several years ago. About a half-mile in length, Riverwalk begins downtown and travels around and through the city's historic Old Yacht Basin to its newer Small Boat Harbor, home of Southport Marina. Riverwalk terminates in a grand observation deck located in the Intracoastal Waterway marsh.

Of course, the public is invited to fish free of charge for the Southport city pier, right next to Waterfront Park, one of the best spots in town for picnicking or just feeding the seagulls.



Canoe trails in Long Beach

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