DNREC Division of Parks & Recreation highlights installation of solar panels that now power Fort Delaware State Park

U.S. Senators Tom Carper (kneeling, right) and Chris Coons (kneeling, center), and Delaware River & Bay Authority Executive Director Tom Cook (far right) joined DNREC Secretary Shawn M. Garvin (kneeling, left) and students from the Gunning Bedford Middle School at a ceremony today at Fort Delaware State Park in Delaware City showcasing new solar panels that now power Fort Delaware on Pea Patch Island.

DELAWARE CITY – DNREC's Division of Parks & Recreation today marked the installation of 540 solar panels to power Fort Delaware State Park. U.S. Senators Tom Carper and Chris Coons, PSEG representatives, Delaware City Mayor Stanley Green, other state officials, and schoolchildren joined DNREC Secretary Shawn M. Garvin for the dedication ceremony, which featured a tour of the Civil War-era fort and its new solar energy source. The ceremony also marked the opening of Fort Delaware for the season.

A diesel generator, which formerly powered the facility, was damaged during Superstorm Sandy in 2012. As part of the disaster recovery funding, $94,000 was provided by the Federal and Delaware Emergency Management agencies for the design, engineering, and infrastructure construction needed to install the solar panels, along with $180,000 from DNREC's Division of Energy & Climate. The panels were installed in 2017, and generate 37.5 kilowatts or 170 amps per year, enough to power

the entire facility every day, rather than just when the fort is open to the public.

“Installing the solar panels at Fort Delaware is an excellent outcome from a horrible storm,” said U.S. Sen. Tom Carper. “Rather than just fixing the old diesel generator, now the state park can be powered cheaply, efficiently, and in a cleaner way. That’s a win-win for our environment and the state’s bottom line.”

“Enhancing the visitor experience, reducing the operating cost of this site, and improving the air quality are three ways this project is great for Delaware,” said U.S. Senator Chris Coons. “I am grateful to PSEG’s generosity and the spirit of collaboration that helped drive this project with DNREC. Fort Delaware has an incredible history that more people should know about, and I hope this project helps attract more visitors and increase the park’s capabilities to facilitate those visitors.”

“This solar power installation at Fort Delaware not only helps protect our environment, but also our historic legacy,” said Governor John Carney. “In addition, the improvements will help boost our $3.3 billion tourism economy, as Fort Delaware attracts more than 15,000 visitors every year.”

Prior to the installation of the solar array, for the fort to operate during the season, the generator required drums of diesel fuel to be brought over by boat throughout the season. This was not only inefficient, but there were also safety and environmental concerns. The new solar array provides $18,000 – $20,000 of clean, efficient energy per year, or the equivalent of 180 barrels of diesel fuel. In addition, the new solar array provides power for the entire year, enabling heat, lights, security cameras and dehumidifiers to run in the winter months when parks staff is not available to run the generator.

DNREC partnered with PSEG Power, a New Jersey-based energy company, which donated 700 total solar panels for the project.

The panels are located on the roof of the fort, 50 feet above the floodplain and are not visible from the ground or from within the areas of the fort open to the public.

“The new solar panels at Fort Delaware provide energy savings and a cleaner environment,” said DNREC Secretary Shawn M. Garvin. “We have seen time and time again that energy efficiency is one of the most cost-effective ways to lower energy use and operations costs, making Fort Delaware’s power needs more affordable and efficient to operate, and environmentally friendly. The solar array provides constant and reliable energy for year-round operation at the fort. The use of solar energy is among the best ways to protect and preserve the environment now, and for the future.”

“The Fort Delaware project helps point the way forward toward a sustainable future for all,” said Ralph LaRossa, president of PSEG Power. “We are no stranger to Delaware, having developed the PSEG Milford Solar Farm in Kent County, which remains the state’s largest solar installation. We are proud to partner with DNREC to replace diesel generators with solar panels and move Delaware toward a clean energy future, demonstrating that we can have both a strong economy and a healthy environment.”

Fort Delaware was built as a Union military post that held approximately 32,000 prisoners over the course of the Civil War. Today, award-winning living-history interpreters put a human face on history. A ferryboat takes visitors out to the fort on Pea Patch Island, which is also known for its wealth of birdlife. For more information, visit www.destateparks.com/park/fort-delaware/ or call 302-834-7941.

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