



able to access a beach also includes being able to park near it and use a public restroom.

Catherine McCabe, the state's environmental protection commissioner, says her department will take a renewed look later this year at beach access, including the issues of parking and restrooms.

Speaking at a forum Monday on New Jersey's beaches at Stockton University, McCabe said the Department of Environmental Protection will seek input from various stakeholders on possible changes to or expansions of state rules "when dealing with fair and equitable access requirements with respect to parking and restroom facilities."

"It will not be an easy task," she said.

That's because New Jersey's previous beach access rules, which required public restrooms in many shore towns, were struck down by a court in 2008 as overly broad. Under the administration of former Democratic Gov. Jon Corzine, New Jersey required public access points every quarter mile, and public restrooms in any shore town that accepted government money for beach replenishment.

Two shore towns, Stone Harbor and Avalon, fought the rules in court, primarily objecting to a provision that beaches remain open to the public 24 hours a day. Designed with fishermen in mind, the rule nonetheless raised fears of legal liability for towns if someone got hurt on a beach at night with no supervision.

The rules that were struck down by the court also included a requirement that public access points be provided every quarter mile along the shore. But under Corzine's Republican successor, Chris Christie, the DEP eliminated a statewide access standard, leaving it up to each individual shore town to determine how much or little public access they want to provide.

New Jersey has been struggling for decades over how much access the public should have to its 127 miles (204 kilometers) of ocean beaches. In recent years, access disputes have flared up along riverfronts in the central and heavily developed and industrialized northern part of the state.

Some Jersey shore beach towns have plenty of ways to keep outsiders off their sand: Limit on-street parking, prohibit food and drink and have no public bathrooms. One town literally walls off the public from much of the ocean with a protective stone seawall and offers nearly no parking for miles along it.

"Having the ability to park your car and use a restroom are integral components of having meaningful access to a beach," said Tim Dillingham, executive director of the American Littoral Society, which has pushed for greater beach access in New Jersey for decades. "In many places, it's the key barrier that keeps people from using a beach."

New Jersey recently enshrined its Public Trust Doctrine into law, establishing the public's right to swim in waterways and walk along their shorelines. But that bill, signed into law by Democratic Gov. Phil Murphy in May, did not restore statewide access standards that previously existed.

McCabe indicated a willingness to consider reinstating those standards.

"A quarter of a mile to have t